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BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE GARDEN OF ALLAH," "THE GREEN CARNATION," "BELLA DONNA," "THE CALL OF THE BLOOD," ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER I

Before the great war broke out Mrs Marden had been, or had seemed to most of her acquaintances to be, a decidedly worldly woman. She was good-looking in a dark and rather disturbing way, with brilliant observant eyes, a clear white complexion and quantities of jet black hair. She was fairly clever on haphazard lines, could be entertaining, cared very much for clothes, society and change, and spent a great deal of money chiefly on herself and her only son, Ronald. Her husband had died when Ronald was ten, and she had never seemed to regret him very much, though it was supposed that she had married for love. She always showed great affection for her boy, who was handsome, gay and joyous, and of whom she was obviously proud. But even her closest friends thought her a decidedly frivolous woman, and few, or none, suspected her of having any great depth of character, or any

intensity of emotion. Many a mother is proud of a handsome and popular son. Why not Evelyn Marden? Ronald did her credit. Of course she was fond of him. It would have been odd if she had not been.

Both mother and son took life easily, gaily. Ronald, after his schooling, entered the Grenadier Guards. He was a first-rate horseman, a splendid dancer, an accomplished flirt, and a very kind and affectionate son. His Mother and he were good comrades. They had a similar taste for gaiety and all the good things of life, a similar distaste for serious thought and for what they called " the solemnities ". Neither had any strong feeling for religion, any interest in the deep problems of life. Both were butterflies. Both energetically lived for the day, and both thoroughly enjoyed their light and successful existences.

Then the great war broke upon the world and the Guards were ordered to France.

The day for Ronald's departure came. He was in high spirits, full of an almost animal expectation of new excitements and marvellous experiences. The sense of impending danger did not trouble his spirit. It really did not occur to him that death might be awaiting *him* out there on the other side of the water. He

had the curious, and wholly unreasonable feeling, common to many men in the flush of their youth, that others might die but not he.

When the time drew near for him to say good-bye to his Mother he saw for the first time tears in her eyes.

"Are you afraid?" he asked her.

"Of course I am!" she said, almost crossly and as if she were half ashamed.

"You needn't be. I know I shall come back all right."

"How can you know?" she said.

"I just feel it in my bones. I'm convinced of it. One knows such things."

"That's all nonsense, Ronald. We can't look into the future."

"I've never wanted to. Have you?"

"I don't know that I've ever thought much about it till now. But a war like this makes one think."

"Look here, Mother, if you turn so awfully serious all of a sudden you'll give me the creeps. Do you want to unnerve me?"

His still laughing eyes sought hers.

"Bid me good-bye gaily and it will be a good omen. I believe fear brings beastly things on a man. Most of the fellows are wild to be off. There's precious little weeping and gnashing of

teeth in the regiment, I can tell you. You don't want me to be an exception, do you?"

"Of course not. But you musn't expect a woman to rejoice at such a time as this. It wouldn't be natural."

"Now do buck up, Mother, or I shall have a bad memory of you to take away with me."

Perhaps this half smiling threat struck home to Mrs Marden. Anyhow she seemed to fall in with her son's humour and she managed to bid him good-bye almost gaily. His absolute certainty that he would come out of "it" all right certainly cheered her up. She said to herself, "Perhaps somehow he knows. Such a conviction may be founded on fact, conveyed to him Heaven alone can tell how. I mustn't be a fool. A coward dies a thousand deaths. So what's the good of being a coward?"

And she saw him off without tears.

But when he was gone she felt, as she would have expressed it, horrible. Suddenly all the pleasant things on which she had till now depended for enjoyment were as nothing to her. A sense almost of anger, at any rate of injury, possessed her. She did not know what to do. It was no use sitting at home and "grousing". On the other hand when she went about she felt like a lost dog. The effort to seem gay

fatigued her soul. Besides gaiety was slipping out of London. She realised abruptly how little her companions in pleasure meant to her. She longed to "hang on" to something, but there was nothing at hand to hang on to.

She took a feverish interest in the war and read five or six London papers a day. But what she read only deepened her misery. For doom seemed approaching from Germany with elemental steps. And the Guards were in the thick of the struggle.

Many women whom she knew, and who had always seemed to be butterflies like herself, had taken suddenly to going to church. She thought she would go to church. If she was anything she supposed she was a Protestant. So she went to a Protestant church. She knelt, she made a half-hearted effort to pray. But all the time she was on her knees, with her face in her hands, something within her kept saying, "What is the good of this sort of thing?" She had not the slightest feeling of any nearness to God, of being in communication with anyone. That there was some mysterious Power which had brought the earth on which she lived, and all those other worlds which she knew nothing of, into being, she vaguely believed. But she really could not believe that this Power had

ears to hear anything she might say, or a heart to bother about her. She thought of the millions of men and women in Asia—China especially; she did not know why—in Africa, America, and elsewhere, and she thought, "Of course it's absolute nonsense to imagine that He, or It, can attend to individuals, or know anything whatever about them. The idea is ridiculous." And her brain blankly rejected it.

Some hymns were sung. Her literary sense —she had a good deal of light-hearted interest in the arts—condemned them. They were undoubtedly puerile as literature. And the music to which they were set—she liked the modern school in music, Poldowski, Cyril Scott, Scriabine, Delius—seemed to her terribly "tuney" and banal. Then a clergyman mounted into the pulpit. He was a tall, ascetic looking man, with a cadaverous face, lantern jaws and earnest but melancholy eyes. As Mrs Marden looked up at him she felt that he was the sort of man she would never be able to "get on with" in private life. While he was giving out his text she was thinking how she would feel if she had to sit next him at a dinner. She was sure their attempts at conversation with each other would prove a fiasco. Still, there he was, a clergyman, one who had chosen the profession of trying

to help others in moments of difficulty or distress; one who no doubt believed thoroughly in all the things she had never been able to believe in. She might get something from him. He might open a door for her, enable her to pass into some chamber where comfort awaited her. She was determined to listen to him. And she did listen.

He preached about the war. He said that it was a "visitation" sent to the world because of the world's wickedness. He declared that Europe had earned a great war, that indeed it was overdue, as the evil of the times "cried to Heaven". Warming to his theme he spoke of gluttony, the passion for dress, bridge parties, the loosening of the marriage tie, the craze for pleasure, motoring on the Sabbath, beauty shows, cigarette smoking, prostitution, the worship of games, racing with its attendant evil of betting on the horses, the Tango—"but that's gone out long ago," thought Mrs Marden in her pew—music halls, and other horrors. "I have never set foot in a music hall," he said. "But I am told——" and there followed a torrent of hearsay.

"This is no good to me," thought Mrs Marden.

Nevertheless she continued to listen.

Having set out the list of those things which cried to Heaven for punishment, among which were a good many indulged in from time to time by Mrs Marden—she had, for instance, danced the Tango when it was in fashion, and had frequently played bridge and motored on the Sabbath—the Preacher proceeded to a consideration of what he called "God's Justice". He illustrated this by a reference to the earthquake at Messina which so horrified the world some years ago. Many people, he said, had asked how God could allow such a disaster; some had even had their faith shaken by it. But though he himself—the music hall over again—had never set foot in Messina he had been "credibly informed" that before the earthquake it had been the wickedest city in the whole of Europe. Mrs Marden, who knew both Paris and Messina—as well as her London—could not help smiling at this announcement. "Poor dear little Messina!" she thought. And again the voice within her said "This is no good to me". From that moment her attention began to wander. Nevertheless she was often looking at the Preacher. She found herself as it were musing over his peculiar features, dwelling on, almost dallying with—mentally of course—his long thin nose, his sunken cheeks,

his jutting forehead and earnest, melancholy eyes. And so this was a clergyman! She felt sure he was a very good man. There was something in his expression and even in his manner which informed her of that. He looked self-denying. He was certainly not a glutton. She felt as she gazed quite positive that he had never danced the Tango, even when it was no longer in fashion, that he had never betted on a horse, or entered himself as a candidate for a prize in a beauty show. He had done none of these things, he was a good man. But, in her view, he was an impossible man, too peculiar, too unlike ordinary men, such as she knew, to be able to judge of them. And as for women she felt convinced he was a celibate. (As a matter of fact he was.) Anyhow she knew, like Ronald, in her "bones", that he did not understand women. Towards the end of the sermon, detaching her mind for a moment from the Preacher's physique, she caught the words, "we must welcome this war. We must take it joyfully as a lesson which will lead us to a higher knowledge of our responsibilities, to a deeper sense of our sins, to a fuller realisation of what is required of us."

"Oh dear!" she thought. "Why did I come here?"

The service closed with a hymn in which the rhyming was obviously faulty and the tune, according to Mrs Marden's view, vulgarly hilarious. Meanwhile a collection was "taken up" by several elderly men of lugubrious aspect, who looked towards the horizon while the bag went from hand to hand. Mrs Marden gave two shillings and presently retired in a repentant frame of mind; that is, she repented of having gone to church.

Having from this moment decided that she was not, and could not be religious, she looked about her for some other form of solace. Many of the women whom she knew were taking up "war work". Some were collecting subscriptions for various funds, some were preparing themselves to be nurses in hospitals, some were scrubbing floors and carrying up and down stairs plates and glasses and cups, some were learning to drive motors. One woman she knew had taken a man's place in an office. Several were working busily among fugitive Belgians, placing them out in private houses, finding occupations for them. Finally Mrs Marden decided to take in some Belgians. She screwed her courage to the sticking point and took in three, an elderly fat man and his two daughters. But this experiment was not a success. Her guests,

who spoke only Flemish, did not seem contented or grateful. They were ill at ease in her house, complained of the food in a language which no one understood, were untidy in the bedrooms, and evidently bored to death at her efforts to entertain them. Finally one of them, the youngest daughter, was seized with the German measles. She had to be removed in an ambulance to a hospital. The other two then requested to be placed in more congenial surroundings, and eventually evaporated to Shepherd's Bush. (Mrs Marden lived in Hans Place.)

So ended this little experiment, in distraction.

The war went on. Ronald was still all right and his Mother began to lose some of her fear for him. He wrote to her that he had "a charmed life". She was buoyed up by hope for him. No doubt he would come out of it safely.

Nevertheless she was often conscious of a secret undercurrent of anxiety and uneasiness. She felt constantly "worried", and, when she looked in the glass, saw little lines here and there on her face which troubled her. "War is terribly ageing," she said to herself. "I must do something to distract my mind." The question was what to do. She did not feel herself fitted for hospital work. Driving a motor was

not in her line. The attitude involved in scrubbing floors was too undignified for a woman of her age. She wished very much that something would turn up.

It did.

War matinées began to be the fashion. A friend of Mrs Marden's got up one at the Palace Theatre and asked Mrs Marden whether she would take charge of the programme sellers, who were to be pretty and fashionable girls of society and well known actresses.

"But how am I to take charge of them?" she enquired.

"Oh, all you have to do is to put on your last new gown, your smartest hat, come to the theatre in good time, assemble all the sellers together, tell each one where to go, and see that they keep busy. Map out the theatre on paper. Some must stay in the foyer and near the entrance. Others take the boxes, others the stalls, dress circle, upper boxes, pit, gallery. Tell them all to get as much money as ever they can, and to go especially for the men. There's going to be an album sold, with photographs and autographs. You might sell copies of it yourself. Wander about the stalls in the intervals, smile and look charming. Wheedle people. Don't be humble. That's no good at all. Be

determined. Look surprised if they only give the exact price of the album, and keep on saying, 'But it's for the *soldiers,* you know!' It's really quite easy."

"Very well!" said Mrs Marden.

And she went off to Lucille's and ordered a new gown. She also looked in at a shop in South Molton Street and bought a triumphant hat.

And she made a success of it. She was both fascinating and practical. Nothing escaped her observant eyes. No one eluded her clutches. She spurred the pretty girls to their work. She was charmingly sympathetic to the actresses. And her wanderings among the stalls brought in a rich harvest. Wheedling, she discovered, came natural to her. Even elderly ladies—difficult propositions these—fell ready victims to her smiles and persistence.

"Evelyn Marden's a find," said the friend who had got up the matinée.

And Mrs Marden was started on her career. She had found the war work that suited her. At almost every really fashionable matinée she was in charge of the programme sellers. And her name appeared in large letters on the programmes and was announced beforehand in the papers. She had the pleasure of reading

again and again in the *Daily Telegraph,* "Mrs Marden will be in charge of the programme sellers, among whom will be Lady Mariana Danvers"—and then followed a long list of popular names.

She began to feel herself quite a celebrity. That was not unpleasant. And then she had to keep on replenishing her wardrobe. She couldn't of course wear the same hat and gown at two matinées in succession.

She began really to enjoy herself and to feel she was a useful woman. She talked of "my work" and when she was starting for Drury Lane, or His Majesty's, or the St. James's, would say, "Well, I must be off to my work. The war doesn't give me much rest nowadays."

Ronald was well and hadn't had a scratch. Life in wartime was not such a bad thing after all. It was nice to be useful, pleasant to have found one's niche. It gave one quite a little thrill to put on a new gown, that suited one perfectly, and a hat that took off at least five years from one's age, and to start out in the motor to do one's bit.

"Ronald is working in *his* way, and I am working in *mine,*" Mrs Marden said to herself with an agreeable sense of self-satisfaction.

One day a Royal Princess who "ran" a

hospital for wounded soldiers, and who was in difficulties for funds, resolved to get up a monster matinée at the Coliseum, and, to Mrs Marden's great delight, got her secretary to write a note begging to know whether Mrs Marden would be so very kind as to give her clever and invaluable assistance as organiser of the programme sellers.

"H.R.H.," ran the note, "has heard how wonderful you are in your efforts for the war charities, and would be very grateful for your services if quite convenient to you."

Of course it was quite convenient to Mrs Marden, and she went at once to Reville and Rossiter's to see about a gown for the occasion.

The day of the Princess's matinée was one of her greatest triumphs in the good cause. The theatre was crammed. Two Queens and seven Princesses were present, and Mrs Marden was presented to them all. Her hat was really the smartest in the theatre, and as she wandered along the stalls, wheedling money from the purses of the aristocracy and the charitable snobs who filled them, it could be seen by almost everyone. That was one of the rewards of the ardent worker, and surely no one could grudge it to her. A really enormous sum was taken

for programmes and albums. The Princess was graciously satisfied, and on going away one of the two Queens said to Mrs Marden as she was dropping her curtsey, "How clever you are! You know how to take people."

Mrs Marden drove home to Hans Place quite intoxicated with charity. It had gone to her head like strong wine drunk in a revel.

She was accompanied by a friend, no other than Lady Mariana Danvers, the most popular programme seller in London.

When they reached the house they went into the drawing-room to have tea and cigarettes and to talk it all over.

"It really is extraordinary how the war has brought people out, isn't it, Mari?" said Mrs Marden, as she sank into a deep armchair, after taking off her hat almost carelessly—in the intoxication—and looking at her hair in the glass. "I never knew what I had in me till the guns began to go. And the more I work the more energetic I feel. I shouldn't mind having a matinée every day in the week. And you are untiring too. I don't know what I should do without you. How much did you make to-day?"

"Twenty pounds more than anyone else," said 'Mari' with a negligent air. "There were a lot of funny people from the Midlands in

the stalls. Poor dears! I think I took their last halfpennies."

"Did they know who you were?"

"Oh yes. They live on the picture papers. What minds they must have! I heard one of them—a man of course—saying 'Isn't she a corker?' as I trod on his toes on my way to the stage box. Those are the people to get money from. I can recognise them at a glance now."

"War develops us all wonderfully!" said Mrs Marden. "I never felt so alive as I do now. But I want to talk to you about the matinée at the Alhambra. Don't you think it would be a good idea if we were all in Watteau dresses and powder for it? You would look quite wonderful in powder, such a dainty rogue! And it suits me remarkably well. To distinguish me from the programme sellers I thought of carrying——"

At this moment the butler opened the door and came in with a salver on which lay a telegram.

"I shouldn't wonder if it's from the Princess," said Mrs Marden, as she took it. "She told me she might want to see me to-night about the takings. I daresay she wishes me to dine at——"

While speaking she had opened the telegram and looked at it. She did not finish her sentence, but sat quite still with it in her hand and her eyes fixed on it.

"Any answer, Ma'am?" said the butler.

"No—no answer," said Mrs Marden.

He went out. She got up and stood still by the tea table. There was something strangely rigid in her attitude.

"Is it bad news?" said Lady Mariana.

"Yes. My boy has been killed in action.

"Oh Evelyn—how awful!"

"Yes, isn't it?"

"My dear—shall I go?"

"Yes, please."

"But can't I do——"

"No. It's official—from the War Office. Good-bye, Mari." She pressed the bell.

"Hanson, will you call a cab?"

Her friend looked at her hard, then, without going near her, turned away and went out of the room.

CHAPTER II

When she was left alone Mrs Marden stood for a moment looking at the telegram. She felt dull and weak but not actively miserable. Her mind was scarcely working at all, but she was conscious of a strange and unusual feebleness of body. This had come upon her abruptly when she read the telegram. She said to herself, "Ronald has gone—disappeared from me for ever. I shall never see him again. I shall never hear his voice. We shall never have another talk, never laugh at a joke together, never dine at a restaurant and visit a theatre together again." She said this, but she did not thoroughly realise its truth. It was as if she were telling herself something in order to make herself believe it. But her mind was reluctant or stupid, and refused to grasp anything. The feebleness of body increased upon her, and she took hold of the mantelpiece, leaned against it, then sat down in an armchair. Several remembrances were jumbled confusedly in her mind; the Watteau project for the Alhambra matinée,—Mari getting money out of the funny

people from the Midlands, her own wanderings along the stalls of the Coliseum, the Queen's remark to her when she made her curtsey.

Then she seemed to quit the theatrical scene and to be in church, looking up at the melancholy clergyman. She heard again, mentally, his words: "We must welcome the war". And then she seemed to hear Ronald saying, "I have a charmed life". It was all very absurd. Ronald, the clergyman, Lady Mariana in powder and a Watteau dress stood together and looked at her. Presently she heard a voice saying, "Ronald is working in *his* way and I am working in *mine*". It was her own voice. But Ronald was not working. His work was over.

She glanced about the drawing-room, and her eyes fell on her hat, which she had laid down on a small table of inlaid wood near the window. She looked at it steadily. It was a large hat —large hats suited her—black and green in colour, turned up at one side, with an aigrette in the front. She thought it looked grotesque, almost monstrous. It was too large for any woman. It was meretricious, flamboyant. It was an ugly, ridiculous thing. Why did people wear hats at all? There was no sense in it. She almost began to laugh as she looked at it. Then

she felt angry, enraged. Somehow she connected the hat with Ronald in her mind. He had been fighting while she had been buying hats—that ridiculous hat among them. He had been dying while she had been dressing up. He had been dying—how? How had he died? The telegram did not tell her. But anyhow he was dead—and there was the hat lying on the table, a symbol of the way in which she had done her bit.

Suddenly she felt a great loathing of herself. It was unreasonable, no doubt, but she was not a reasonable being at this moment. She looked at her war life and she hated it. She could no longer comprehend how she had been able to lead it while her boy was fighting in France. And she had written to him about it, had described her activities; had made the most of them. And he had responded with generous praise of her. He had written "It's good to hear you are hard at work". Hard at work in that hat!

She got up and went towards the hat. She intended to do something—she was not sure what—but at this moment the butler opened the door. She stood still. He came in to clear away the tea. As he was about to go out of the room with it he said,

"You will be at home to dinner, Ma'am?"

"I shall be at home, but I don't want any dinner to-night."

The man looked astonished.

"I've had bad news, Hanson," she said. "Mr Ronald has been killed in France."

The tray shook in the butler's hands and the china rattled.

"Oh Madam!" he said. "Oh, I'm very grieved! I was fond of Mr Ronald!"

"Thank you, Hanson. Well, we must bear these things somehow."

"Yes, Madam. I'm very sorry——"

He paused. Then he ejaculated,

"Shocking! Shocking!" in what seemed to his mistress a voice strangely human, strangely unlike a butler's voice.

And then he went out very slowly, stooping more than usual over the tray.

"Poor Hanson!" thought Mrs Marden. "I had no idea he was fond of Ronald."

She felt very sorry for the man. He was probably in the servants' hall by now and was telling the other servants all about it.

A clock on the chimney piece struck the half hour after six. The sound reminded her of the passage of time, but not of its swiftness, of its slowness. A gigantic vacancy stretched be-

fore her—life. She had really loved nobody in the world but Ronald. Evidently she was a woman with a small heart: there had only been room in it for one human being. That was bad luck for her now. It meant that she had no one to turn to. And she knew such shoals of people. The posts brought her quantities of letters and notes. Swarms of visitors came to her door. When she went about she was perpetually nodding and smiling, stopping to say a few words to one or another. And all this had meant practically nothing. What on earth was she going to do?

The room presently began to grow dim. The hat on the table became a dark shape. Night was gathering London into its blackness.

"Well, we must bear these things somehow." She had said that to Hanson. The question was how. How was she going to bear this particular thing? What was she going to do? She did not even know how she was to manage to get through this evening. And then there would be the night. Well, she had better go upstairs and take off her smart gown, the gown which had gone with the hat.

She could not bring herself to touch the hat. So she left it lying on the table and went slowly upstairs. She shivered when she came to her

bedroom. As she opened the door she heard someone moving about inside. It was her maid, Henriette. As she went in the maid turned sharply,

"Ah! ma pauvre Madame——" she began.

But Mrs Marden interrupted her.

"Merci, Henriette. C'est triste mais il n'y a rien à faire. Vous pouvez vous en aller."

"Mais, Madame me permettra——"

"Je n'ai besoin de rien. Je veux être seule."

When the maid was gone Mrs Marden locked herself into the room. She took off her gown and put on a silk dressing gown and slippers. Then she lay on a sofa at the foot of the bed and shut her tearless eyes. She had not the least inclination to weep. She was quite mistress of herself. Indeed she felt if anything calmer than usual, abnormally calm. It was easy to her to lie perfectly still with her head on the large cushion.

As she lay there she wondered why it was that she had not missed Ronald more while he had been away. She had often missed him. Many times she had worried about him terribly. Nevertheless she had been able to enjoy her activities, to be proud of her poor little successes, to throw herself with ardour into her work. Her hours with the dressmakers had

been pleasant hours. In the theatres she had been conscious of excitement, of many an agreeable thrill of gratified vanity. That very afternoon for quite a long time she had not thought of Ronald at all. That was a simple fact. It surely ought to have meant indifference. And yet it had not. Her heart must have been with her boy all the time since she cared really for nobody else. She had "counted" on his return. That was it. His absolute confidence had infected her. And now this was the end. But it was the beginning, too. That was the terrible thing. It was the beginning of her new life. She was born that evening into a new existence, that of the woman who has no child. Everything must be different for her henceforth as long as she lived.

More than one woman whom she knew had lost a son in the war. She remembered writing letters of sympathy to Lady Terrerton, to Millicent Ashton, to Enid Vaux, and some others. She had even attended a memorial service at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields for the Terrertons' boy, who had been rather a pal of Ronald's. And now a similar disaster had come upon her. After the memorial service Diana Terrerton had written her a letter in which had occurred these words: "I feel Willie is near me still. I am

often conscious of his presence and of his desire to communicate with me. This is a greater comfort than you can imagine. At the very moment of his death I seemed to see him standing beside me like a shadow, with his eyes fixed on mine. I knew he had passed over before the telegram came. But we are still together. He knows everything I do. We are not really separated. I am convinced that there is no such thing as separation for those as closely united by love as Willie and I have always been."

Mrs Marden recalled all the sense of that letter while she lay still on the sofa. When she had received it she had thought that Lady Terrerton was the dupe of her desire, like so many others. She had not believed that there was "anything in it". Men did not often think such things probably because they had masculine hearts. Once she had talked to Ronald about communication with the dead and he had begged her not to get among those who went "in for that unutterable rot".

Ronald had not come to her at the moment of his death. Till she had received the telegram from the War Office she had felt exactly as usual. No message had been conveyed to her telepathically.

She tried to be quite sincere with herself, and presently she knew that she did not as yet realise Ronald's death. She was horribly aware of it and yet somehow she had not got hold of it as a definite, dreadful fact. The reality of the difference in her life was not at all fully apprehended by her. Even Hanson had seemed more moved by the news than she had been. And he was only the butler.

She tried to realise Ronald's death more fully. Remembering Lady Terrerton's letter she tried to think of her son as translated to another world, as no longer the prisoner of the body, but able to do what the soul in the body cannot do. Was he, perhaps, with her now unseen, unheard, impalpable? Did he know she was half stunned by the blow she had received, and did he wish to comfort her? She tried to feel him in the room with her, but she did not succeed. Nothing came of her effort. In church she had said to herself, "I am not religious and I can't be religious. Now she said, "I am not imaginative and I can't be imaginative. And that sort of thing is all imagination. People are determined to believe that there is no separation brought about by death. They must create comfort for themselves. But death is really complete separa-

tion. Ronald and I are in two different worlds —if there is another world. We can never get near to each other."

Really she felt that her boy was in France with earth heaped over him. But even this she felt with a certain vagueness.

Night fell. The fire crackled on the hearth and threw leaping shadows on the wall. Presently there was a soft knock on the door. Mrs Marden heard it but did not answer. It was repeated twice. Then there was an odd little sound, then silence.

After a few minutes she sat up, leaned forward and looked towards the door. Two letters, or notes, had been pushed under it and lay on the carpet. She got up and opened them. Both had come by hand. One was from the Duchess of Brancaster, Lady Mariana's mother. The other was from Lady Terrerton.

"My dearest Evelyn, Stella Brancaster has just told me——"

It was quite a long letter. Mrs Marden did not read it. Nor did she read the Duchess's note. She put both down on her dressing-table, made up the fire, undressed and got into bed. She felt unusually cold in her body, and pulled the eiderdown up to her chin.

And then she lay there with her eyes wide open.

After a long time she heard two more gentle knocks, and then the voice of Henriette say, "Madame! Madame!" She held her breath. Silence again! The silence of the long night! She was in her big bed and Ronald was closed up in a box hidden under French earth. She had not uttered a prayer. Was she an unnatural mother? No tears, no prayers. Only one thing marked the day as a special occasion. She had had no dinner. That was her only tribute to Ronald's great sacrifice. Well, that was not her fault. She could not be other than she was.

She thought, nevertheless, about prayer. But she still had the feeling which had obsessed her in church. It was impossible for her to imagine a Being who had the capacity to be aware of the existence of each individual in the swarming world, of a Being who sowed the firmament with worlds and who yet could pay attention to a woman in bed in Hans Place. Did anyone really believe that, with never an assailing doubt, never a moment when the inner voice said, "But that is simply impossible. My reason, even my instinct, rejects it!" Did that melancholy looking clergyman believe it? Did

the Bishop of London, the Archbishop of Westminster believe it?

"And yet I have heard that they sometimes pray for rain," she thought.

Suddenly she remembered the controversy about the angels of Mons. And she said to herself, "People will believe anything—even soldiers." "People"—but she was not in that crowd. She had never before felt herself to be so truly individual as she did to-night, so definitely and absolutely separated from all her fellow beings, and especially from her fellow Mothers. She knew she was outside of that fellowship of mourners. If she mourned she would mourn in her own way. If! She was scarcely mourning now.

The fire began to burn low. The shadows contracted, vanished finally. It was deep in the night, but she felt no inclination to sleep. Yet she was not fidgety. She did not turn on the pillow. She lay almost as still as Ronald was lying in France. And the emptiness of the world came upon her and flooded over her. She lay in the void, living in deadness. That was her feeling, that she was uselessly alive in deadness.

With the morning came the necessity for activity of some kind. Again knocks sounded

at her door; and this time she got up and opened. Henriette was there looking very anxious and enquiring, with a tray holding tea and bread and butter.

"Has Madame slept?" she asked.

"I've had quite a good night."

She got back into bed and drank the tea and ate the bread and butter, on Henriette's account. For it seemed to her a useless thing to do. Meanwhile Henriette did things about the room. Presently she approached the bed and asked, in an unnatural sort of voice,

"What gown will Madame wear this morning?"

"Oh—something black, I suppose," said Mrs Marden.

The maid's thin bird-like face looked momentarily shocked. She murmured something about the necessity of Madame getting some "mourning."

"Yes, I shall have to think about that," said Mrs Marden. "Put out anything black and then you can leave me."

Henriette obeyed, and finally left the room with a backward glance that suggested fear. Then Mrs Marden read the two missives that had arrived the night before. Apparently the morning's post was not in yet or, if it was,

Henriette in her perturbation had forgotten to bring it.

The Duchess of Brancaster's note was simply a short, but very kind, almost tender, note of condolence, not stereotyped, truly sympathetic, and with even a touch of originality. But Lady Terrerton's letter was very long, covering several sheets. Mrs Marden read it slowly and carefully, and then re-read it.

It was an offer of help. Lady Terrerton told Mrs Marden that she could help her wonderfully, bring light into the darkness of bereavement, show her the way to reunion with the son who had just exchanged this earth life for a higher existence on another plane.

"I suffered indescribable anguish when my boy was killed," she wrote. "No words can tell you what I went through. Life was insupportable and I longed for death. It seemed to me utterly impossible that my misery could ever know any alleviation. But this lasted only a very short time. Very soon, as I believe I wrote to you, I had the feeling that Willie was still near me and was trying to get into communication with me. He seemed to be silently urging me to do something. At first I could not tell what it was. But I spoke of it to a dear friend, an occultist, and she

was able to put me in the right way. I cannot explain it all by letter but I beg you to come to see me or let me come and see you. It only requires patience, and a strong effort made *with the right people and in the right surroundings,* and a bridge can be formed between this earth life and the life on another plane in which our dear ones are now as vital as, and far more happy than, they ever were with us. Do, dearest Evelyn, take my words seriously even though you are bowed down with misery. Going to church is no use. I have tried it. Clergymen cannot help you any more than they helped me. But there is a way to peace, even to happiness, and *I have found it.*"

Mrs Marden laid the letter down at last and thought of Ronald. Of course she realised what Lady Terrerton meant. Since her boy's death she had disappeared from society and Mrs Marden had never seen her. But she had heard vaguely that Lady Terrerton was given over to "occult practices", and had heard people speak of her as a "poor dear thing", who had become quite crazed about "that ridiculous spiritualism".

And that sort of thing was just what Ronald had hated and laughed at when he had been alive. She herself knew very little more about

it than he did. She had never felt the slightest interest in anything of that kind. The other world had never bothered her, and she had never bothered about the other world. This world had been quite enough for her and for Ronald. And even now, when she thought of her boy, and, in imagination, called him up before her, with his tall straight figure, his merry eyes, and his rather impertinent gay expression, the expression of one who was ready for anything in the way of fun and larkiness, she could scarcely imagine that he was out of it. She could scarcely conceive of him as quite still, quite grave, quite silent.

"Even though you are bowed down with misery," Lady Terrerton had written.

But she was not bowed down with misery. She wondered at herself. Would the acute anguish ever come to her? Would the tears never gather in her eyes, the sobs never rise in her throat?

Presently she got up, made her toilet, put on the black gown, took the two letters and went downstairs. It was half past nine. She telephoned to her sister to tell her the news. Then she went into the dining-room mechanically to breakfast and found Hanson there. He looked at her with a sort of submissive and

deprecating curiosity. She bade him good morning and sat down at the oval table on which several letters were lying. As she ate something—she didn't exactly know what—she looked at them. They were written by people who didn't know, and were about war matinées and kindred subjects. As she read them she felt almost sickened. Two were about the matineé at the Alhambra. And there was a letter from the Princess's secretary thanking her for what she had done on the previous day, and asking her to go with H.R.H. to visit the "wounded men for whom you have worked so hard."

When Mrs Marden had finished them she got up from the breakfast table.

Since she had begun her successful war work she had engaged a secretary, who came in generally for an hour or two in the mornings and helped her with her correspondence. She remembered now that this girl, Miss King, was due in Hans Place at eleven o'clock that morning. She had not thought of putting her off, so of course she would come. Better so! She could deal with the morning's letters and also let people know that her employer would be unable to help at any more matineé performances. Meanwhile Mrs Marden de-

cided to write to the Duchess of Brancaster and to Lady Terrerton.

The answer to the Duchess was soon finished. It expressed Mrs Marden's gratitude and sense of her great loss, and was written mechanically. While the pen moved over the paper she felt cold and detached, and oddly impersonal.

"What is the good of all these letters?" she thought. "What is gained by them? Why do we have to write them?"

And it seemed to her that life was largely made up of actions which were wholly unnecessary, that the web of civilisation was full of threads which merely complicated the fabric, without adding to its beauty or even to its strength.

After addressing the letter to the Duchess Mrs Marden took another sheet of paper and prepared to answer Lady Terrerton. But this was a more difficult task and she hesitated before beginning. Lady Terrerton's letter was evidently written straight from the heart; and was a warm gush of feeling which had flowed over paper. There was in it a touching sincerity, a complete absence of all reserve. The eagerness to help a sister in misery was apparent in almost every line. It was impossible not to be touched by such a letter, and Mrs

Marden was in some degree touched by it. But she said to herself, "Diana Terrerton is the victim of an illusion and she wants to hand on her illusion to me. That's no good." There was a curious obstinacy lurking in her nature that day, something dull, hard, resistant. The softness of grief was far away from her.

Well, she must answer Diana Terrerton somehow, and get it over. She tried to think clearly of Ronald. What would he have wished her to answer to such a letter? She could almost hear him saying, "For God's sake don't have anything to do with all that rubbish, Mother." And her lips formed the words, "I won't."

She wrote, therefore, and refused Lady Terrerton's offer of help. "I don't believe in such things," she wrote. "I think the dead should be left in peace."

Then it occurred to her that if, as she felt certain, there was "nothing in it" the dead were left in peace, whatever Lady Terrerton and those of similar credulity did in an endeavour to disturb them. But—never mind! Let it go! Her letter was fairly long and as kind and grateful as she could make it. She had just finished it when Miss King was announced.

Miss King was a woman of twenty eight, who

looked about twenty two, although she was not made up in any obvious way. Her hair was not dyed; her face was not painted; her eyelashes and eyebrows were not "touched up". "She powders her face and then rubs it off," had been Mrs Marden's silent verdict on first seeing her. Yet she looked six years younger than she was. She had a nice trim figure that somehow faintly suggested masculinity, the maleness of a neat boy. And her dress and manners, even her attitudes, had often made Mrs Marden think of a boy. She wore a white collar, a tie and cuffs, short, close skirts, black brogues with spats over them, small severe hats. Her gaze was direct and her voice sounded practical. Mrs Marden knew nothing whatever of her private life. Her Christian name was Emily. Mrs Marden was acquainted with Miss King, but had never had anything to do with Emily.

"Good morning, Miss King," said Mrs Marden, as the secretary entered the room.

"Good morning, Mrs Marden," said Miss King.

She walked up to the writing-table.

"I am very sorry indeed," she said, "to hear what has happened. Please allow me to say how grieved I am for you. You have always

been very kind to me. I feel the deepest sympathy."

"Thank you. I am sure you do. Did the butler tell you?"

"Yes. I don't know whether you wish me to stay."

"I do, please. Whatever happens to us there are things that have got to be done. I wonder why!"

"Why!"

"Yes; I wonder what is the good of it all."

Miss King looked down at her spats.

"So do I—sometimes," she said.

Mrs Marden got up from the writing-table to give Miss King her place.

When the secretary had sat down Mrs Marden hesitated for a moment, then she said,

"Has this war made any difference in your feelings about things, Miss King?"

"Yes; a good deal."

Mrs Marden sat down in an armchair near the table.

"In what sort of way?"

"I don't know that I could quite explain."

"You haven't—I don't want to be intrusive, but have you suffered any loss in this war?"

"Oh yes. The man I was going to marry was killed two months ago."

Mrs Marden felt tremendously astonished; she scarcely knew why. It had never occurred to her that Miss King might have a lover, be engaged. She had imagined her living with a girl friend, in a little flat, perhaps; cooking nice little dishes on a gas stove; smoking cigarettes, being thoroughly independent. She had thought of Miss King as a rather modern type of working girl, who would have another girl for a "pal", and would not bother her head about men. There were plenty of such girls, she understood.

"I am sorry," she said. "I had no idea—what was he?"

"A dentist. He joined up on the first day the call for men came."

"That was very fine of him."

"Oh yes. But he was that sort of man."

"Have you—have you ever wished he had not been?"

"Two or three times—at night."

Suddenly Mrs Marden felt tears in her eyes. She was very surprised, and wondered vaguely where they had come from, and what had brought them.

"But never in day time," continued Miss King. "One can't always be responsible for

one's feelings. I think he would forgive me for my few treacheries."

"Treacheries?"

"To his ideals, I mean."

"A dentist with ideals!" thought Mrs Marden. "How strange it all is!"

"I wish," she said, "if it is not hurting you too much you would tell me something."

"Certainly," said Miss King.

"When you had the news of—when the news came did you feel it terribly? Did it seem to strike you down?"

"Oh no. I mind it much more now, more every day, I think."

A dull sensation of apprehension flowed slowly upon Mrs Marden.

"Grief is a thing that grows," continued Miss King, "at least that is my experience."

"Is it?"

"Of course I mean real grief such as some people seem quite incapable of."

"Yes—I see. I daresay you are right. Do you live alone?"

"Quite alone in rooms."

Mrs Marden was silent. At last Miss King said,

"What do you wish me to do this morning, Mrs Marden?"

With an effort Mrs Marden came out of her apparent inertia. She dealt with the letters of the day and directed Miss King to write to various people explaining why she was unable to carry out her work in connection with the theatres. A reply to the Princess's secretary expressed her regret at being prevented from visiting the hospital at present, and her satisfaction that she had been able to do something for the wounded soldiers before being obliged to give up everything on account of the loss of her only son.

This was the last note to be written. When it was finished Mrs Marden said to Miss King,

"Will you give it me to read over?"

Miss King handed over the note and Mrs Marden read it carefully. Then she said,

"'Obliged to give up everything'—did you give up when—when your trouble came?"

"Oh no."

"Not even for a little while?"

"Not even for a day. I have to earn my living, you see."

"Yes. I wonder what I had better do."

Miss King was silent.

"What I have been doing seems to me so absurd now," continued Mrs Marden.

"Somebody must do it, I suppose," said Miss King.

"Yes; that's true. I had promised to help at several more matinees. Do you think I ought to do so in spite of what has happened? Do you think my son would have wished it?"

"I can't tell that——"

"No; of course not. I suppose these letters had better go to the post."

"Very well."

Mrs Marden gave back a note, and Miss King put it in an envelope and addressed it.

"Is there nothing more?" she asked.

"No, I don't think so. But please come to-morrow. I—I'm afraid I shall have a great many letters of condolence. I wish people wouldn't think themselves obliged to send them. Of course it is kind, but——"

She stopped. Then suddenly, with a change of manner, she exclaimed,

"Oh, how foolish my sort of life seems now! I cannot bear to think of it. But I'm not fit for anything else. I don't know what I am going to do now, how I am going to live. Miss King, do tell me, how do you manage to get along?"

"How?"

"Yes; do you go to church?"

"Sometimes."

"Does it do you any good?"

"I don't know whether it does."

"I mean do you believe all that is said in church?"

"Oh no. But does anyone?"

"That's just what I have thought. Do even clergymen really believe all they tell us? Can they?"

"I don't know. It's very difficult to answer for other people, isn't it?"

"Of course. I heard a clergyman say that we ought to welcome this war."

"Well, I doubt if anyone can do that sincerely."

"Some people go to spiritualists instead of going to church. Do you believe in all that?"

"I know nothing about it. My—the man I was engaged to went to have his hand read before he left England."

"Was he told anything?"

"Yes; that he would come back safely."

"It's all utter nonsense!" said Mrs Marden. There was a long pause. Then Miss King said,

"You have nothing more for me to do to-day?"

"No."

"Then I suppose I had better be going."

She got up, with her boyish air.

"I do hope you will find comfort somehow," she said.

"Thank you."

Mrs Marden held out her hand.

"And I hope you will," she said.

"I always try to make the best of things."

"I suppose I shall have to do the same."

When Miss King had gone Mrs Marden telephoned to a dressmaker and ordered some mourning. Then she sat down to read the papers. She did not know what else to do.

But she was soon interrupted. The telephone sounded frequently. Lady Mariana had been spreading the news of Ronald Marden's death, and kind friends were enquiring. Notes of condolence began to come in. Some people called to enquire. And Mrs Marden's sister came around to see her and to do what she could to help her.

The energies of sympathy were set in active motion, and Mrs Marden was obliged to cope with them. And all the time she was doing her best to "keep a brave face" to the world she was thinking,

"Oh, what is the good of all this?"

CHAPTER III

"OF course you will have a memorial service for dear Ronald," said Mrs Marden's sister, who was not married, to her three days later.

"Do you think I ought to, Annie?" said Mrs Marden.

Annie, who was very religious, a high church Protestant, looked painfully surprised.

"I think it is a question of feeling," she said. "And then people will expect it. You see, dear, there cannot be a funeral over here. And surely you would wish to pay a last tribute to Ronald's memory. He has behaved so nobly and laid down his life for his country."

"Yes. He gave all he had to give. But the arrangements——" she paused.

After an instant of silence she continued,

"Annie, perhaps I shall shock you very much, but the truth is I am not a religious woman. It isn't my fault."

Annie, who was small and pale, with blue eyes that looked withered, said,

"But you believe, don't you?"

"I'm not at all sure that I do."

"Of course I know that you don't feel quite as I do about these things, but still——"

"I daresay you are right. Where shall I have it?"

"St. Martin's-in-the-Fields is very central."

"Yes; that's true. I might have it there."

"Lady Terrerton had a memorial service for her boy."

"Yes. I will have one for Ronald."

"Shall I see about it, dear?"

"No, Annie. I will look after it all. Ought I to go to it myself?"

"If you think you can bear to. Lady Terrerton went."

"Yes, I know."

"I have met Madame Antoinette Sims. Perhaps she would sing a solo at it. Shall I ask her?"

"It would be very kind of her. Very well. I'll get Miss King to help me with all the arrangements."

"And I'll help you too. I know just how you feel."

"No, you don't. Nobody does," thought Mrs Marden.

The memorial service for Ronald was arranged. It took place on a foggy morning, and Mrs Marden attended it. She drove to

the church with her sister. As she got out of the car and ascended the steps the fog seemed to be walking with her, dulling her senses, laying a soft, clammy hand on her heart. The church held a large congregation. There were many more women than men. As Mrs Marden walked to her place all eyes were turned towards her. She entered the front pew and knelt down. People thought she was praying, but she was not. Presently she got up. A printed form of the service had been provided. She took it in her hand and looked carefully at it.

"I wonder if Miss King is here," she thought. "She did not have a memorial service for her lover. But then people like that don't have to, I suppose. And it makes no difference."

The service began. It was really rather beautiful and touched many people. Mrs Marden, however, listened to it with a sense of almost cold detachment until, after a short pause, the organist played a prelude, and from the gallery, high up and behind her, a great contralto voice, firm, resonant, yet pathetic, began to sing a new setting of Newman's "Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom."

The words, the music, the great voice, which was supported by, and blended with, the deep

and soft glories of the organ, pushed a way down into something which was part of her, or which was perhaps her—her soul. First her intellect said, "These are noble words." Then her heart said, "They came from a beautiful, loving, trusting heart." Then somebody else said, "Oh, my boy, my boy!" And she began to weep. Tears streamed from her eyes and over her face. Her body shook, and suddenly she longed to be alone with her motherhood. It was terrible to be in public, surrounded by all these people, who knew nothing of her grief, whom she wished to know nothing of it. If she could only be by herself with that voice and with the memory of her baby boy, for whom she had suffered, and whom she had lost! She sat down very quietly. She was wearing a veil which she had pushed up when she looked at the form of prayer. Now she pulled it down. The great voice continued. Presently she heard it almost murmuring behind her, with an intimate, indeed a secret, humanity; a sort of withdrawn confidence.

"Which I have loved long since
And lost—awhile."

"But is it, can it be so?" she thought, "He believed it. Newman believed it. He could never have written that if he had not

believed it. But I am so different. And the belief of even a great man proves nothing at all."

She was able to think that in the midst of her tears, as if her intellect were still quite aloof from her heart which was rent and her soul which was yearning.

"Is there a morn? Or is this life in the night all?"

The organ died away. And presently the service continued. She knelt no more. She just sat still with her veil hiding her face till all was over. Then her sister touched her.

"Darling—Evelyn dear, we must go."

She got up, picked up her black gloves which she had taken off at the beginning of the service, and went out of the pew. The congregation standing watched her going while the organist played an arrangement of an *Agnus Dei* by Bach. But just as she was nearing the church door a thin woman in black, with a white ravaged face and dark eyes that looked as if they had wept many tears, stepped quickly out of the last pew on her left, and took gently hold of her arm.

It was Lady Terrerton.

They went out of the church together. Un-

der the portico Lady Terrerton said, in an earnest husky voice, that was tremulous with feeling,

"Forgive me, Evelyn! I couldn't help it. I want you to come and see me, or to let me come and see you. Our boys were friends."

"Yes."

"Will you come?"

"Yes."

"Promise me! I can help you. I must help you. We ought to hand on our blessings in these awful times. It is wicked not to."

"Our blessings?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, you will be so happy presently! Come to me to-morrow."

"Perhaps."

"No, no——"

"Anyhow I will come soon."

Then she went down to her car and was driven away in the fog.

After that service things were altered for Mrs Marden. She had wept at last after the days and the nights of dry and tearless waiting. The unnatural stunned feeling left her. She entered into her grief. She who had seemed strong, almost hard, to those about her, who had astonished and perturbed her servants by her self-possession, her activity, who had sat

reading the papers as usual, dealing with her letters, who had stood at the telephone personally answering enquiries, who had seen several intimate acquaintances and spoken quietly to them of her loss, who, with Miss King's help, had arranged all the details of the memorial service, was now what is called " a broken woman." She shut herself up in her house. She would not see even her sister. She refused to meet Miss King, and wrote on a piece of paper, " Please deal with all letters in the way you think best. But don't ask me what to do. I cannot attend to anything. Refuse me to everybody. Say I am ill." Her only consolation was solitude, the knowledge that no one would look at her, that she would not have to make any effort, or act any part. Her meals were put on the table and she would not have Hanson in the room when she ate them. The servants, except Henriette, only caught occasional glimpses of her. And to Henriette she scarcely spoke except to give necessary orders.

So things continued for more than a week. During that time a letter came from Ronald's Colonel. It gave details of his death and burial. He had been shot through the head and had died instantaneously. His body had

not fallen into the enemy's hands, and had been buried near the field of battle. The funeral service had been read. All had been done in due order. The Colonel wrote warmly of Ronald, and dwelt specially on his cheerfulness of spirit.

"His gaiety was unconquerable," he wrote. "It seemed part of his nature and was never damped by untoward circumstances. It cheered us all up and gave courage to his men. Those who saw him die say that he died with a smile on his lips. I can well believe it. We miss him terribly. He was the very spirit of youth. As to his courage—well, he never seemed to realise the possibility of death."

How like Ronald that was—the not realising! He had thought death could not take him, and she had come to think the same. They had been as blind children, both of them. "Not for me death! Not for me agony! All the bad things for others, all the joys and the good things for us!"

And so she was only suited to live in the shining and not in the blackness. She had developed only that part of her which was fitted for the light side of life, and had never given any thought to a preparation of the soul against the evil day. Therefore she was a woman with-

out moral armour and now she was pitiable even in her own eyes.

In the nakedness of her desolation a strange and hideous desire sometimes obsessed her. She wished that she could believe in a God as many people, perhaps most people, did; in a personal, attentive God, keeping an eternal watch over individuals, presiding over their lives, allowing everything that happened to them to happen, in order that she might hate Him for depriving her of the only human being whom she was able to love. It seemed to her in her misery that most people who were religious worshipped God because they were afraid of Him, like savages seeking to propitiate a powerful and malign Being, who could if He wished overwhelm them with disaster and who was capable of doing this if the whim took Him. The words "Thy will be done" expressed, she thought, a grovelling attitude of mind with which she could never be in sympathy. She preferred what many think the supreme blasphemy of Omar Khayyam, in which man's forgiveness of God is alluded to. There was something tremendous in that, something proud, defiant, and unconquerably fearless. But both the resignation and the blasphemy presupposed a conception of the mysterious Creator which

she had not and was certain she could never have. Yet why was it that Newman's hymn had broken down all the barriers and made her understand the true meaning of her loss? Why had she at last begun to weep when she had heard it? Who could believe in a Kindly Light in the midst of this war, in angel faces smiling and all the rest of it? All that was sheer sentimentalism; beautifully expressed, no doubt, because the man who wrote it happened to possess an exquisite literary gift, and sincerely to believe in what he was expressing. She was angry with herself for having been moved by words which she told herself now were all nonsense. There must be, she thought, a core of folly in her as there was in most people whom she knew. Humanity has always stretched out its hands to idols, laid offerings before altars to which no Presence ever draws near.

She was crudely rebellious in her agony and had nothing to rebel against because of her agnosticism. She was like one who wishes to deal a blow and is confronted by an atmosphere. During all these days she felt savagely alone. She knew that multitudes of women in Belgium, France, England—in Germany too—were mourning for their dead sons, but she

felt no sisterhood with them, no companionship of grief. She was certain that there was no other woman miserable as she was miserable. Others found consolation. She was positive of that. They still had children left to them, or they had husbands, or friends whom they really cared for, or religious beliefs; or they were spiritualists like Lady Terrerton; or they had shallow hearts and were incapable of feeling deeply. Miss King's words were often in her mind, "Grief is a thing that grows . . . Of course I mean real grief such as some people seem quite incapable of." She felt her grief growing steadily within her, like a disease almost that was eating up the tissues of her soul.

Ronald and she had been such comrades. There had been a peculiar bond fastening them together; they had found nothing to condemn in each other and they had both drunk in happiness from the same sources. If she had found her happiness in church and he had found his in the music halls, it wouldn't have been the same. They had been butterflies together in the sunshine. They had loved each other in laughter. How often they had laughed together! What a link their merriment had been! Melancholy had seemed preposterous to both

of them. Ronald had often said to her, "I hate people who are always down on their luck!" And she had agreed with him. Neither of them had ever got on with very sensitive people, or with those who took life as a solemn business.

And yet beneath all the gaiety, the zest, the joy of life, she had, unknown to herself, been carrying about in her this tremendous capacity for suffering and had never suspected it! Her ignorance of herself had been almost incredible. What else was there in her of which she knew nothing? She was afraid of herself as of a stranger with whom she was forced to live in a horrible intimacy.

She had never been physically a passionate woman, and her love for her husband had not been deep. She had liked him, appreciated him, got on with him quite well, but his death had not left her desolate. She had been prepared for it. He had had a rather long, but not painful illness and had died at Cannes peacefully. Ronald had been with them, a boy of ten. And, because of Ronald, she had not felt left alone. The child had been much more to her than the father, who had always been a delicate man, with quiet, literary tastes, devoid of exuberance and inclined to be rather

astonished at it. Ronald had had her nature, not his father's. But could he ever have suffered as she did now?

Sometimes she wondered, thinking of herself as dead, of him as alive without her.

A cataract of strange, often apparently of disconnected thoughts flowed through her mind in these days and nights. For her mind was violently alive now, and seemed to have fastened teeth in her like an indomitable beast. In her grief she was tremendously egoistic, and this fact made her finally aware that she believed Ronald was only decay, all of him. If she had had any genuine instinct telling her that he was alive in some other world, she could not have been such an egoist. For then she must have concerned herself about him, about the possible conditions of his existence, about his happiness or the reverse, about his remote activities, about his feelings for her. She must have wondered whether he had any knowledge of what she was now undergoing.

She could not do this, because she thought of him as now only matter mouldering to dust in a grave in France, and could not think otherwise of him.

"I am and he is not."

That, and she came to know it, was her

actual conviction. So she sat, or lay awake, alone with her suffering and stared perpetually at it and at herself.

One day Miss King sent up a message by Henriette begging to see her if it were only for a moment.

"Please ask Miss King what it is about," said Mrs Marden. "I don't want to see anyone."

"But Madame cannot live always like this!" said the maid. "If Madame——"

"Please go to Miss King at once, Henriette!" Mrs Marden interrupted.

Henriette went out pinching her thin lips together. She came back in a few minutes.

"It is about Miladi Terrerton, Madame."

"Well?"

"Miladi keeps writing and telephoning. This morning she has telephoned to say she must see Madame, that she will call at three o'clock. Miss King has replied that Madame is unwell, but Miladi says she quite comprehends but will come nevertheless. Miss King——"

"Ask Miss King to come up."

"Bien, Madame."

The maid went away and left Mrs Marden wondering. She was wondering why she had so brusquely decided to see Miss King and

what she was going to say to her about Lady Terrerton. She remembered of course the scene under the portico of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields. She had not thought about it seriously till this moment, though Lady Terrerton's spiritualistic practices had been in her mind when it had dwelt upon the consolations other women found in their sorrows. But now she did begin to think seriously of Lady Terrerton and her desire to hand on her blessings. Poor woman! How earnestly she had spoken! How eager she had looked! She had meant what she said. That was certain. There could be nothing selfish in this persistence of hers. She must believe devoutly that she had made a great discovery. She must be anxious to be a good friend. Mrs Marden felt faintly grateful to her.

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in!" said Mrs Marden.

Miss King walked in. She looked just as usual, just as neat, composed, precise and yet boyish. But when she saw Mrs Marden she stopped.

"Perhaps you——" she said.

Then quickly recovering herself, she came forward.

"Good morning, Mrs Marden."

"Good morning. Why did you stop at the door?"

"I wasn't sure you wanted to see me."

"But I had asked you to come up."

"Yes."

"I know why you stopped. You were startled at my appearance. Wasn't that it?"

"You don't look as well as I should like to see you."

"You mean that I have lost my looks, that I have aged terribly in these last few days. Well, I know it and I don't mind. I don't care what I look like. I'm not living for other people now. It isn't worth while. They're no good to me, so why should I bother about them? I have found out that people you can't really care for are quite useless to you except when you are playing about. And I've done with all that."

"I understand what you mean. But surely some day——"

"Miss King, I'm one of the unfortunate people who are capable of real grief. I wish I wasn't. It's a curse to be like that, but there it is."

Miss King was silent.

"Now please tell me about Lady Terrerton."

"She seems determined to see you whether

you wish it or not. It doesn't seem kind or delicate, but really I think she means it very kindly. She has written—you know you told me I was to open all letters——"

"Yes, of course."

"It is all about her son. She says he comes to her, talks to her, that he is alive and happy in the other world. It is all very strange, but she evidently believes it."

Miss King paused.

"Yes?" said Mrs Marden.

"She wishes to help you as she has been helped."

"How?"

"She says she must see you. I said I was afraid she couldn't—through the telephone. She replied that she considered it her duty to see you, whether you wished it or not, and that she would come to-day at three. She asked me to tell you this personally. I had told her I hadn't seen you since—since the service."

"No."

"At last I said I would try to see you. I hope you will forgive me. I didn't know what I had better do."

Mrs Marden sat without saying anything for a minute; then, looking at Miss King, she said,

"I think you're a very sensible girl, Miss King."

Miss King blushed slightly, perhaps at being called a girl.

"I don't know," she said.

"Tell me, if you were in my place would you go, into this with Lady Terrerton?"

"Yes, I think I should."

"Why?"

"Well, we know so very little that I think we ought to examine into things for ourselves, things that may be important to us, I mean. It seems to me a mistake to deny possibilities. Perhaps I don't make myself quite clear, but——"

"Oh yes, you do. But if you were certain a thing was all nonsense—delusion—would you waste your time over it?"

"Not if I were really certain, if I had examined into it for myself and knew there was no truth in it."

"I see; you would do that first."

"Yes, I think I should."

"Thank you. You can tell Lady Terrerton I will see her when she comes."

"Very well. Good morning, Mrs Marden. I am sorry I had to disturb you."

"Perhaps it was a good thing. I don't know.

Life is so hideous. I can't think how you go on as you do. You must have an iron will, or enormous courage, or something. What is it? Perhaps you have hope? Religion means something to you?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"I cannot believe that the whole human race has been given an instinct which is founded on nothing and leads nowhere."

"What instinct?"

"Well, that there is something else for us besides this life."

"The whole human race! But——"

"I think the exceptions are really very few."

"But people *will* believe in what they want to have."

"You think it's that?"

"Yes, I think it's that."

She said no more, and Miss King, after waiting a moment, went quietly out of the room.

Soon after three o'clock Henriette came to Mrs Marden to say that Lady Terrerton had called and was in the drawing-room.

"I'll come to her in a moment," said Mrs Marden.

When the maid had gone out she looked at herself in the glass. She had not forgotten Miss King's pause of astonishment on entering the room where she was that morning. Grief had certainly altered her appearance. In some subtle, peculiar way it had roughened her face, made her look almost rugged. Formerly she had had a smooth face with very few lines in it, humorous observant eyes, a gay, perhaps slightly sarcastic mouth. There had been a touch of Ronald's impudence in her expression, the not unpleasant impudence that is born of a light heart and excellent health. Now she looked what women sometimes call "battered", very much older, but also much more expressive. There was in her eyes an almost fierce self-consciousness, about her mouth an intense bitterness. It was strange to be looking like that. If Ronald could see her now he would be astonished, he would scarcely recognise her. She could imagine him saying to her, "Why, Mother, what on earth has happened to you? You must have been grousing like the very devil to look like that!"

She turned away from the mirror and went downstairs.

When she came into the drawing-room Lady Terrerton, who was standing, came towards

her, gazed at her with eyes that took in all the changes in her face, then kissed her.

"Poor Evelyn! I know—I know! But I had to come, whether you wished to see me or not."

"But I do wish to see you, though it will be no use."

"Wait! You don't know. Some day you will bless me for my persistence. You are in the darkness like so many others. But I shall show you how to reach out to the light."

Mrs Marden twisted her dry lips. At that moment she was pitying her friend, and even in her grief she felt superior to Lady Terrerton.

They sat down together on a sofa and Lady Terrerton said,

"Do you believe I am a sincere woman?"

"Yes, I do."

"And you know how I loved Willie?"

"Yes."

"We were wrapped up in each other. He told me everything. Many mothers are almost strangers to their sons. They know less about them really than many other women and than their pals. Of course they may guess things. Mothers have strong instincts. But their sons wish to keep them more or less in the dark; and they often succeed in doing it. I know that."

"I daresay they do."

"Willie was not like that. I knew his faults. He didn't mind my knowing them although he reverenced me. I am going to tell you something to prove to you how deeply in earnest I am and how sincere in my wish to help you. I have never got on with my husband. We don't understand each other; we don't suit each other at all. Probably you have never suspected this?"

"No. I thought you got on very well."

"He doesn't care for me," said Lady Terrerton simply. "I bore him."

Mrs Marden was silent.

"So you see Willie was everything to me, absolutely everything, because I am not a woman who could ever try to find consolation with a lover. Now you understand just what my loss was. It could not have been greater."

"I see that."

"It was quite as great as yours."

"I suppose—I daresay it was."

Mrs Marden said that, but she was unable really to believe it.

"And yet I can bear it bravely. I can even be happy in spite of it. I am happy."

She said the last words with deep conviction, smiling.

"Doesn't that tell you something? I am very happy. I would not have Willie back on earth with me."

When Lady Terrerton said that Mrs Marden felt that a gulf yawned between them, that it was useless to go on with the conversation, but she only said,

"That is very wonderful."

"The whole of our existence is a wonder. We are marvels and our destiny is beyond measure marvellous. Now, dear, I want you to listen to me. Never mind if you think I am talking nonsense. Only listen. Only try to realise that hitherto you have lived in the dark. Only try to be as a little child."

"I can't be that, I'm afraid."

"Yes, you can. There is very little difference between a child's ignorance and ours on this plane. Willie says so."

Mrs Marden's body stiffened at this remark, but she said,

"I will listen to what you have to say."

"And don't be the spirit that denies. That is all I ask."

"I will try not to be."

She leaned back on the sofa, folded her hands, and listened.

When Lady Terrerton went away, perhaps an

hour later, Mrs Marden had promised to go to her house on the following afternoon to meet a certain medium called Peter Orwyn.

She knew she would keep her promise, though she felt no real interest in the matter. But Lady Terrerton's deep earnestness had touched her, and she had not forgotten Miss King's advice. Miss King was a very sensible woman; and perhaps she was right, perhaps it was foolish to deny that things could be when one had never studied them, examined into them. And—nothing really mattered now one way or the other. The fabric of life was crashing down all about her. Death and destruction were in the air, under the waters, on the broad surface of the earth. There was nothing stable anywhere. An era was passing away. She wished she could pass away painlessly with it, but probably she would live to be an old woman. Useless people, people without hope or desire often lived to be old, and the ardent and young and desirous were cut off—like Ronald.

On the following day she started for Berkeley Square, where Lady Terrerton lived, in a dull condition of mind. She walked there. When she was entering the cosy square she thought of Ronald's contempt for all occult

practices. But there was no Ronald now. He would not know what she was doing. She felt quite certain of that.

When she went into Lady Terrerton's drawing-room she found her hostess there with a middle-aged man who was introduced to her as "my dear friend Mr Peter Orwyn."

CHAPTER IV

Mr Orwyn was broad-shouldered, thick-set, with a powerful red face, earnest dark eyes, a heavy iron-grey moustache and iron-grey hair carefully brushed and parted in the middle of his head. He was well dressed in a braided morning coat and dark striped trousers. His hands were large and capable, his movements slow and controlled. He looked, Mrs Marden thought, like a quiet prosperous business man, a manufacturer, or cotton-spinner, someone who had many men under him, who was accustomed to control people and manage affairs. There was a sensible, honest look in his eyes. He spoke in a melodious deep voice, rolling his r's. He was obviously not quite what is generally called a gentleman. On the other hand, there was nothing vulgar or genteel about him. His manner was simple, straightforward, unselfconscious, and he had no air of wishing to make a tremendous impression on those he was with.

After a few words Lady Terrerton said,

"I am going away for five minutes, Evelyn.

I want you to have a little talk alone with Mr Orwyn."

And she went out of the room. When the door was shut behind her Mrs Marden said,

"Of course Lady Terrerton has told you about what has happened to me?"

"Yes, she has. I understand from her that you have none of her knowledge, that you have never tried to put yourself in communication with the spirits of the departed."

"I never have, I don't believe such communication is possible. Please don't think I am rude in saying so."

"I like your sincerity. You have never made any study of spiritualism, I suppose, never read much about it, never come in contact with any mediums?"

"No, never. My boy laughed at that kind of thing when he thought of it at all, which was very seldom."

"Quite so, quite so. I have two sons, Mrs Marden."

"Yes?"

"One is still at school. The other is in the army in France."

"And do they believe in spiritualism?"

"The younger one does. The other—he is a great athlete—does not. He is very much

held in the body. But he's a fine fellow and brave as a lion."

"But then—do forgive me—what does he think about you?"

"He just takes me as his old Dad. He knows I love him and have always done my best by him. That's enough for him."

"I suppose he thinks you are self-deceived?"

"That's about it, I should say. But I'm not. All over London I have brought comfort to the bereaved."

"Do you think you have a special gift, some extraordinary faculty which enables you to—to serve as a means of communication between the living and the dead?"

"There are no dead," said Peter Orwyn firmly. "Your son is not dead. You are living in an illusion like many others. Do you mean to tell me that you have never felt that you have something in you which is a free thing, which illness can't injure, which accident can't destroy, which is independent of the body? What are you suffering in at this moment? Is it in anything physical? Is it in the brain? Is it in the heart—that organ which a surgeon can take out of your body and put back again without killing you? I say—no! You're suffering in your soul, your eternal spirit, the

part of you which is unable to be handled, which is unable to die, and knows it."

Mrs Marden was silent. At that moment she was trying to examine herself. Was she conscious of having something within her which could not be killed, a flame which nothing could extinguish? She realised that she could not imagine not being. She certainly felt as if she would and must persist. Yet she also felt that nothing of Ronald persisted.

"I cannot see why we should not cease," she said, after the long pause. "We are a miserable race after all. Look at what we are doing now, destroying each other mercilessly. Why should such creatures as we are go on and on for ever?"

"Have you always felt like that?"

"No," she said truthfully. "Till my boy was killed I thoroughly enjoyed life, and thought I was fond of people. I looked upon everything differently then."

As she spoke the sense of her misery flowed upon her, and the robust looking man sitting with her and gazing earnestly at her, seemed suddenly remote.

"And you will change again."

She heard his deep voice speaking melodiously.

"This is only a passing shadow falling across your destiny. You are being educated; that's all."

"Could you speak like that if your eldest son had been killed?" said Mrs Marden, with sudden sharp penetration.

She saw an odd look, like something shrinking or cowering, come into his eyes as she spoke. It vanished almost instantly.

"I think it is much easier to preach consolation to others than to find it ourselves, when we need it," she continued.

"I do not preach it, I bring it," said Mr Orwyn firmly. "I have brought it to Lady Terrerton. I am prepared to bring it to you, on one condition."

"What is that?"

"Merely that you do not deliberately fight against me. I don't ask you to believe without proof. But I do ask you to be ready to accept proof."

"I think—I hope I am a reasonable woman," said Mrs Marden.

"No doubt. Now let me ask you a question. Do you believe in the efficacy of prayer?"

"I'm afraid I don't."

"Why not?"

"How can there be a Being who allows, or

disallows, anything—the death of a soldier in battle, for instance—merely because someone in England, or elsewhere, doesn't pray or does pray about it?"

"I don't know. But I believe prayer works wonders."

"Then I think it's very hard on the soldier who has no one to pray for him."

"I pray for my son. Did you never pray for yours?"

"Yes; but I never had any real feeling that my doing so was any good."

"Then why did you do it? You were moved by an inward impulse I suppose?"

"I don't know exactly why I did it."

"I do. You did it because your soul knew far more than your brain."

"Well, when I went to church I thought it was all nonsense, and I think so still."

"Will you come to a sitting with me?"

"Yes; I will do that."

"I will tell you a few names of people who have sat with me and been convinced that I have the power to open up a means of communication with those who have passed out of this world."

He mentioned several names of well known people, both men and women. Two of the

former were scientists of repute. Another was a famous writer. One of the women was a distinguished poetess.

"Do you think such people are likely to be deceived?" he asked her.

"I don't know. I think crowds of soldiers were deceived in the retreat from Mons."

"Ah! You mean about the presence of protecting angels?"

"Yes."

"Well, you must judge for yourself. I am sure I shall convince you."

"I should be very glad if you could."

"That is the right frame of mind," he said very earnestly.

At this moment Lady Terrerton re-entered the room, and shortly afterward Mr Orwyn said good-bye and went away.

As soon as he had gone Lady Terrerton eagerly asked Mrs Marden what she thought of him.

"I think he has an honest sort of face," she said.

"He's absolutely sincere, absolutely."

"But I suppose he takes money for what he does?"

"Yes. Is that a crime?"

"No. But still——"

"Clergymen take money for being clergymen. The Archbishop of Canterbury has fifteen thousand a year and two palaces. The Pope has the Vatican and Peter's pence. Do we blame them?"

"I don't want to blame anyone, but—the money question makes me very suspicious about the whole thing."

"Dear, I think that's unreasonable. Everyone has to live."

"Has Mr Orwyn always been a medium?"

"No; he was once a Baptist Minister, in Lancashire I believe. Then he was led to join the Salvation Army. When he discovered his powers he gave everything up to devote himself to their development. He is very far from being rich."

"He told me he had two sons."

"Yes, and he adores them, especially the eldest, who is fighting."

"I know."

"How do you know?"

Mrs Marden knew by the look she had seen in Peter Orwyn's dark eyes, but she only said,

"He told me his eldest son was a very fine fellow."

"He isn't a bit afraid for him."

"Why should he be if he is as sincere as you say? If there is no such thing as death, as he says he believes, fear must be impossible to him."

"Ah! but there's the separation."

"Mr Orwyn has no right to be afraid as others are afraid," said Mrs Marden obstinately. "If I had his faith, the whole of life would be changed for me, and I with it. But I could never have it."

Lady Terrerton looked deeply distressed, almost piteous.

"Then you refuse——"

"No, I will come to a sitting."

"To-morrow at eight. That's all I ask of you."

"Am I to come here?"

"No. We will go to Mr Orwyn's house in Hornton Street, Kensington. His number is eleven B. But I'll call for you about half past seven."

"Very well. But—I know it is all nonsense, and my boy had such a contempt for that kind of thing."

"Evelyn, believe me, he has no contempt now. He understands now. Our eyes are veiled, but he sees clearly at last."

Mrs Marden looked at her friend with a sort

of deep wonder. It was impossible to doubt Lady Terrerton's sincerity. And Peter Orwyn looked and seemed sincere too. How strange the diversities of human belief were! And human follies, how various they were, and yet how some forms of folly persisted through the ages!

"What is it, Evelyn?"

"Nothing."

"But you look so strange!"

"Do I? I was only thinking that if we hadn't a sense of humour some of us would go mad."

"A sense of humour! But what has that got to do with these profound and marvellous truths?"

"I could hardly explain, dear. Good-bye and thank you for all your goodness to me."

On the following evening Mrs Marden felt specially miserable, almost desperate in her misery. A longing to remain shut up alone possessed her. She was afraid of exposing her wretchedness to the eyes of others almost as if it were a poor deformed body undressed. And when she was told that Lady Terrerton was waiting for her in a taxicab she was seized by an almost overpowering reluctance to go with her to Hornton Street. But she over-

came it by a great effort of her will and went down.

"Of course we shall be alone with Mr Orwyn," she said to her friend as they drove away.

"No, dear——"

"But I can't meet strangers. Please stop the cab. I must go back."

Lady Terrerton took her hand and held it tightly.

"Evelyn, there must be a circle."

"A circle?"

"Mr Orwyn obtains his power from it. He needs help. There will only be two other people."

"Who are they?"

"Mr Cyril Hammond——"

"Do you mean Hammond the essayist?"

"Yes. You will like him."

"Oh, I don't care for anybody now."

"That will pass. The other sitter will be Arthur Burnley, Endsley's brother. Surely you know him?"

"I've just met him. But I hate meeting people now. I thought we should be alone or I wouldn't have come."

"Dear, we are forced to have the right conditions. Otherwise we should get no results.

Mr. Orwyn requires more help than some mediums do."

Mrs Marden said no more, but when the cab stopped before a small house in Hornton Street she got out with slow reluctance. Her limbs seemed heavy and weak, and a sort of nausea of sorrow was upon her. She had never before felt such acute and helpless agony at her loss, such impotence, such a sense of being a victim of the unknown, as she felt at that moment. She was physically affected and found it difficult to mount the flight of stairs which led to the first floor, and when she reached the landing she whispered to Lady Terrerton.

"Oh, I wish I hadn't come, I wish I hadn't come!"

"Hush, dear!" said Lady Terrerton, gently pressing her arm. "You will feel differently very soon."

They entered a narrow, simply furnished drawing-room, running from the front to the back of the house. In it Mr Orwyn was waiting for them with two men. He wore the braided morning coat and the striped trousers, and looked red, earnest and quietly powerful as on the preceding day. After welcoming them in a hushed way, he said to Mrs Marden,

"Do you know our two friends?"

"I know Mr Burnley," said Mrs Marden, in a scarcely audible voice.

And she shook hands with a long-faced, acute looking man, about thirty years old, whose small sunken brown eyes seemed to pierce whatever they glanced at.

"This is Mr Hammond—Mrs Marden."

Mrs Marden bowed to a round-faced, round-headed man, with grey hair, large widely open grey eyes and a pouting energetic mouth, who bowed in return with an air of grave formality. Then Lady Terrerton greeted the two men with her quick eager manner, which was full of nervous intensity.

"Mrs Marden sits to-night for the first time," said Mr Orwyn, in his deep melodious voice. "She comes among us not as a convinced believer but with an open mind. The curtains"—he turned towards Mrs Marden—"are drawn as you see. The windows behind them are shut. I shall now lock the only door in the room, so that no one from outside can disturb us. We are going to sit round that table."

He locked the door, then pointed to a good sized round table which stood in the centre of the floor at the back of the room. On it lay a tambourine, a rattle and a concertina.

"There is the cabinet."

With one large hand he indicated some thin curtains which, hung on a brass rod, concealed an angle of the room.

"As you can see, there is nothing in the cabinet but a chair."

And he went over to the curtains and pulled them back, disclosing an ordinary kitchen chair.

"The preparations, as you see, are very simple," he added, still addressing himself to Mrs Marden.

"Yes," she said, almost in a whisper.

She was thinking, "And very absurd!" tragically, not with any sense of humour. The sight of the rattle, the concertina and the tambourine with its bells made her feel almost sick. How Ronald would have laughed at it all! But she hated it, because he was falling into decay somewhere in France, and she was in this room with these people because of just that. She looked at Arthur Burnley and Mr Hammond with miserable piercing eyes, that asked them silently, "Do you two men, clever, educated, worldly-wise, both of you—do you believe that this childish paraphernalia will be made use of by the spirit hands of men who have fallen bathed in blood to save England? Do you believe that this thick-set, red-faced man in a braided coat and striped trousers is able

to call back the dead to eleven B Hornton Street?" They gave no answer to her silent question, only looked grave, self-possessed, well-bred and devoid of all sarcasm. Arthur Burnley's curious eyes glittered in the electric light from their deep-sunken sockets, and Cecil Hammond's pouting mouth opened, then closed firmly as if he decided that silence was the wisest policy at that moment.

Lady Terrerton's ravaged face had a passionate, hungry expression that was almost terrible in its vividness. A sort of greedy maternity stared out of her burning eyes. Mrs Marden looked at her with pity, and yet was almost ashamed for her. She was exposing something that ought not to be seen by these men who were enclosed with her in this narrow, locked-up chamber.

"There is something frightful in longing when it goes about naked," thought Mrs Marden. And she tried to bring on her own face an expression of vacant indifference.

"Now!" said Peter Orwyn.

And he turned out all the lights except one, a lamp with a red shade, which stood on a tiny table in a corner of the front part of the room, close to the window which looked on to the street.

Immediately the room became mysterious, the faces of those in it more significant, more mental. Arthur Burnley's eyes gleamed with light like a cat's. Cecil Hammond's energetic mouth suggested inexorable firmness. Lady Terrerton's pale features resembled those of a mask modelled and painted to represent famine. And the red face of Peter Orwyn seemed to gain in power suddenly.

"We will begin now," said Orwyn.

He sat down heavily in front of the round table.

"You might sit by me," he said to Mrs Marden.

She took the chair on his left. Arthur Burnley sat at his right by Lady Terrerton. Hammond sat between the two women.

"Place your hands lightly on the table," said Orwyn in a low voice to Mrs Marden.

She obeyed. The others followed her example and the sitting began.

For perhaps ten minutes there was a profound silence.

During the silence a change took place in Mrs Marden. Her feeling of bitter ridicule faded gradually away and was replaced by a sensation of expectation, which seemed to her rather physical than mental. Her body

seemed to be expecting something while her mind brooded vaguely on the horrors of the war. Then she felt, or thought she felt, the personalities of those sitting with her as if they were gaining in strength, in meaning, as if they were setting up a definite communication with hers. Finally, however, this feeling about all of them except Peter Orwyn flickered out in her, like an expiring flame, and she was conscious only of the medium as a force powerful and increasing in power, spreading, filling the room. She seemed to feel him in her hands which tingled, then in the whole of her body.

After a while the usual table-turning and rappings took place. These did not interest her at all. On the contrary, they irritated her and seemed to get in the way of something which she wished to know more of, and which was interfered with by them. Messages purported to come for Lady Terrerton and Arthur Burnley. Several were from "Willie," according to the table. Finally the table for an instant rose from the ground without apparently being touched by any of them. Then the curtains of the cabinet swayed violently as if blown by a wind, and there were rappings in various parts of the room.

After all this Peter Orwyn seemed to fall

into a deep sleep. He breathed loudly, painfully. His eyes closed. Drops of perspiration rolled down his red face. Then Arthur Burnley, who evidently knew what ought to be done on such occasions, got up softly, turned out the one lamp, plunging the room in complete blackness, and returned to his place. The medium moved uneasily in the dark, trembled and groaned as if in pain. Presently he began to speak, at first in an almost inaudible voice. Finally he said, "Mother!" twice loudly.

"Who is it?" said Lady Terrerton eagerly in the dark.

"Mother, I was wrong—I know the truth now!" said the voice, which was quite unlike Peter Orwyn's.

It sounded like a young voice, not a child's but a young man's voice, typical of well-bred young England. It suggested to Mrs Marden the public school, Sandhurst, even the Guards. She could not imagine Peter Orwyn speaking like that. After a pause this voice said.

"You are doing the right thing. Keep on! I can't say any more now. I haven't enough strength somehow. But I'm——"

The voice had become much fainter. After a half second of silence the word "Ronald" was just audible. Then the medium shivered,

rolled in his chair, breathed heavily for two or three minutes. A dead silence succeeded. It was broken by Orwyn's deep voice saying,

"Please turn on the light."

Burnley obeyed. When the lamp was lit Mrs Marden saw that Orwyn's earnest eyes were fixed upon her.

"Did anything come?" he asked.

"Yes, yes!" said Lady Terrerton. "It was wonderful!"

Mrs Marden said nothing.

Orwyn got up. He seemed tired and preoccupied.

"I must have some water," he said.

And going over to the door, he unlocked it and went out of the room. Then they all rose from the table and moved about. Mrs Marden found herself with Cecil Hammond near the window looking to Hornton Street.

"Do you believe in all this?" she asked him, not looking at him.

"I think it is worthy of investigation," he said, noncommittally. "Orwyn undoubtedly possesses some strange power. He has proved that to me. I don't pretend to understand what it is. But several people say he has spoken to them with voices which they recognised as the voices of dead relations or friends."

As he spoke she raised her eyes to his and saw in them a question. But she did not answer it. She longed to go away, to be alone in her own house. But evidently there was something more to come and she was tied to Lady Terrerton to-night. After some more uneasy conversation Peter Orwyn returned, looking calmer. He again locked the door and said,

"We will sit once more. There seems a great deal of power to-night."

As he said the last words he looked, as if enquiringly, at Mrs Marden.

"I wish you to tie me up," he continued, turning to Burnley and Hammond.

And going to a bureau, he opened a drawer and produced some lengths of strong cord.

Burnley and Hammond then quickly and deftly tied his arms tightly to his sides, and fastened his legs firmly together at the ankles and also above the knees, while he sat in his chair by the round table. Then they resumed their places. Arthur Burnley took his seat last after turning out the lamp.

This time no voices spoke, but the concertina was played, the rattle sounded, and the tambourine seemed to float about the room, for they heard its bells above their heads, sometimes near, sometimes apparently at a distance.

Lights also flashed in the darkness high up near the ceiling, and again there were rappings.

When the electric lights were switched on Orwyn was found in his chair, still firmly bound, breathing heavily and streaming with perspiration. He looked like a man who had been making a strong physical effort.

Arthur Burnley and Hammond unbound him. Without saying a word he got up, went to a sofa, and sat down, holding his head with both hands and resting his elbows on his knees. He did this very naturally and un-selfconsciously, almost as if he were alone in the room. Meanwhile they all remained silent. Lady Terrerton looked at Mrs Marden, but the latter kept her eyes fixed on the ground. Hammond drew aside one of the curtains and opened a window, letting in the cool night air. Arthur Burnley lit a cigarette.

Presently Peter Orwyn raised his head.

"I'm afraid I can't sit for materialisations to-night," he said, speaking slowly like a weary man. "I'm tired. We have had a new friend with us, and it seems to me that I've been used by a new and very powerful, very urgent, personality. I have a sense of struggle. It may be easier another time. I can't try any more to-night."

"We'll go, dear Mr Orwyn, we'll go!" said Lady Terrerton. "I quite understand. It's been very wonderful. You must rest now."

"Presently," he said, "I should like Mrs Marden to remain behind for a few moments, if she will."

"But how shall I get home? I came with Lady Terrerton," said Mrs Marden.

"Perhaps Mr Burnley won't mind seeing me home," said Lady Terrerton.

"I shall be delighted," said Arthur Burnley.

"My taxi can stay for you, Evelyn."

"Very well. Thank you," said Mrs Marden.

She did not know whether she wished to stay or not, but she did not feel inclined to make any effort just then. And to refuse would have required an effort on her part.

When the others had gone she said to Peter Orwyn,

"Why did you wish me to stay?"

"I wanted to ask you whether there was any manifestation which seemed in any way connected with you," he replied. "When I am in a trance I know nothing. Some mediums, I believe, are partially conscious, have some idea of what is happening, of how they are being used. I am not. I am as one dead for the time. Did anyone come for you?"

"But you said just now you had a sense of struggle. How could that be if you were totally unconscious?"

"It's difficult to explain. When I came to I felt it. I had a feeling of having been rent."

"Oh—yes."

"Did anyone come for you?" he repeated.

"How can I say?"

He looked steadily at her.

"Did you hear any voices you recognised?"

After a pause she replied,

"I wish to be perfectly truthful."

"Of course, of course."

"I did hear a voice which was not unlike the voice of someone—I—I have been closely connected with. But it only said a very few words."

"It might say more another time. You seemed to bring power."

"How can I bring power?"

"It is all as much of a mystery to me as it can be to you, Mrs Marden. I am a poor ignorant man. I don't pretend to understand these mysteries."

"Why should you be picked out to be used by the dead?"

"I could not tell you. The greatest scientists could not tell you."

He was silent. At last he said,

"Will you come again?"

"If you'll allow me I will let you know."

"Certainly. I should like to be the means of helping you as I have helped others."

"Thank you."

They parted without any mention of money. Peter Orwyn went down to the street door with Mrs Marden and helped her into the waiting taxicab. Just before the cab drove away she looked at him from the darkness of the interior. She could see his face and broad figure distinctly, for the night was not very dark. There was nothing mysterious about him. Certainly he made no effort to look unusual. There was even something that suggested honesty in his businesslike costume, neat, well cut, carefully brushed and tended. A stockbroker dressed in much the same way. As she looked he bowed, in a simple sort of manner without pomposity. Then the cab drove off.

What was this man? Either he was a rascal, a clever trickster making money out of the misery of yearning and credulous people, or he was a being with peculiar, not yet understood powers, of which he himself knew very little, a being not unique perhaps, but exceptional, with strange faculties, with an organisation quite

unlike that of most of his fellows. He neither looked nor seemed at all like a rascal. Even Mrs Marden's naturally strong prejudice against those whom she had always thought of as vulgar frauds did not enable her to dislike Orwyn, or to hold him in contempt. But the floating tambourine, the whining concertina, suggesting sailors having a jollification in a public house—the blatant rattle, the rappings, the lights—what else but trickery could have produced the childish phenomena of the night? She dismissed them from her mind as absurd, contemptible, even disgusting, and thought of the so-called messages which had come. Those from "Willie" had been ordinary, not silly, not common, but such as it would be very easy to invent. "Willie" had spoken—or Orwyn had spoken—comfortable words to Lady Terrerton, had touched on his happiness, his activities, the necessity of the sacrifice of all the young fellows who had given their bodies to the grave for their country. It would not be at all difficult for a very ordinary mind to think of such messages.

And then there had been the voice! It certainly had resembled the voice of Ronald. When first it had spoken in the dark saying "Mother!" urgently, Mrs Marden had with difficulty kept silent and motionless. For a

moment she had felt that Ronald was with her, had something of vital importance to say to her, and when the voice had spoken again it had still seemed akin to the voice of her boy. But now she said to herself that young officers, like public school boys, like Oxford undergraduates, are imitative. She had often noticed this passion for imitation in them and laughed at it gaily. Ronald and his comrades had dressed in the same sort of way, had worn their hats, when in mufti, at a similar angle, had cut their moustaches to the same length, had affected the same kind of gait. They had even all stared with an expression typical of the regiment in their young eyes, and their voices, their intonations, their ways of drawling, of clipping their words, had been absurdly alike. Other people besides herself had heard and could recognise at once the young Guardsman's special way of speaking. Many people with even a moderate gift of mimicry no doubt could easily imitate it. Peter Orwyn might be a clever mimic, capable of reproducing the Guardsman's typical voice. Was she going to be such a fool as to be taken in by a trick of that kind?

And yet a clever man like Hammond believed that Peter Orwyn possessed some strange

power, which was worthy of investigation. And he had told her that several people had affirmed their belief that from Orwyn's lips had issued the voices of their dead relations and friends.

"But people will believe anything!" Mrs Marden said to herself, repeating the words that were becoming almost a formula in her mind. "One cannot take their evidence as truth. Nobody's word on such matters can be implicitly trusted. One must investigate and judge for oneself."

And then abruptly, as if in a hurry, her mind added, "But there's nothing in it all. It is all trickery, nonsense, a means of making money."

Making money! But she had not paid Peter Orwyn anything. Well, she would arrange about that with Lady Terrerton.

When she was shut in at home, she sat up for a long while by the fire in her bedroom. The "sitting" had acted upon her nervous system. She felt painfully and unnaturally alert, bristling with a sort of feverish vitality. And there came to her a great longing to apply some drastic test to Peter Orwyn. She did not believe in him. That was impossible. And yet somehow she did not feel that he was a dis-

honest rascal. Possibly he possessed some extraordinary faculties which were purely physical, and which enabled him to levitate inanimate objects, and to cause rappings on walls and pieces of furniture. Possibly, when self-hypnotised, he was moved to speak with odd voices and could not help himself. And from those sitting with him he might easily draw suggestions. She, for instance, had of course been thinking about Ronald that evening and might have conveyed to Orwyn some of her knowledge of Ronald. And then Orwyn might have been moved to speak as he did. The words had been quite ordinary, just the sort of thing that anyone might have invented on the spur of the moment. It was the voice which had impressed her and which now she could not get out of her mind.

Suddenly she realised that the séance in which she had just taken part had meant more to her than the service which she had attended in the early days of the war. She had come away from the church with a strong feeling of detachment from Protestantism. But had she come away from Hornton Street with an equally strong feeling of detachment from spiritualism? In church she had said to herself, "This is no good to me," and her brain

had rejected the teachings of the church and any belief in the efficacy of prayer. Now again she said, to herself, of spiritualism this time, "This is no good to me!" But she did not repent of having gone to Hornton Street as she had repented of having gone to church. That marked a subtle difference between two states of unbelief. She had never wished to test the melancholy clergyman who had said, "We must welcome the war." But she did wish to test Peter Orwyn.

As she sat by the fire in the dead of the night alone—terribly alone—in the silent house, which would never again be the home of her boy, her woman's mind sought for a means by which Peter Orwyn might be tested, a means by which she could prove whether he really believed that the so-called dead still lived, still concerned themselves about those whom they had loved while on earth, still were able to speak to them, or whether he was a trickster throwing dust in the eyes of the credulous for the sake of mere money-making. And presently she knew she had found the means. Love is drastically sincere. Find in any human being a deep love and you find at the same time absolute sincerity. Peter Orwyn loved his soldier son deeply. Mrs Marden knew that.

Orwyn might be tested through his love for his son.

She looked into the fire and remembered the fleeting expression of agony which she had seen in his eyes when she had spoken of the possibility of his boy being killed in the war as Ronald had been killed. Had she perhaps already applied the test to Orwyn and had it proved him to be insincere as a spiritualist? She could not be certain. For there was some sense in what Lady Terrerton had said to her about the natural human dread of physical separation from a loved one. She had appeared to condemn it, perhaps, but she had known at once that it held truth. Yet, if Orwyn were sincere in the belief which he proclaimed and which he tried to put into others, he could not tremble for his son's safety as the atheist, or even as the agnostic, must tremble for the safety of a loved one exposed to incessant danger.

"If his eldest son were to be killed I should very soon know whether Orwyn is a fraud or genuine," Mrs Marden said to herself.

She shuddered as she realised that for a moment she had almost wished another to suffer as she suffered. But she longed to know the truth of Peter Orwyn. Whether she would go to him again she had not decided.

A clock on the chimney-piece chimed once.

She had been sitting up by the fire for more than two hours. How quickly the time had gone by! She got up and went towards the bed. Then for a moment she hesitated. She was considering whether she would kneel down and try to pray. But suddenly the whine of the medium's concertina, the tinkle of the tambourine's bells, were again in her ears. She did not kneel, but quickly switched off the light and got into bed.

And there she lay still and thought of the voice.

CHAPTER V

Mrs Marden did visit Peter Orwyn again. She felt that she was weak even foolish in doing so. She was secretly almost ashamed of herself. But life gaped before her like the void, black, horrible, empty, and anything that for an hour or two distracted her thoughts, diverted her mind from lonely self-contemplation was a little help to her.

The second time she visited Hornton Street the same sitters were present with her, and the manifestations which took place were very similar to those at the first séance. But they were supplemented by two more definite exhibitions of the powers of the medium.

Peter Orwyn entered the cabinet, and presently against the darkness immediately in front of it a luminous face became visible. It was not very distinct and was surrounded by white wrappings. The complexion was colourless. No hair was shown except upon the upper lip, where there was a darkness like a closely clipped very short moustache such as soldiers wear. The eyes looked like two vague hollows

in the head. At first no words came from the pale and vaguely defined lips.

"It's Willie!" Lady Terrerton exclaimed, in a voice half choked with emotion.

But the face turned in Mrs Marden's direction and a whispering voice breathed "Ronald".

The face remained visible at an altitude of perhaps some five feet ten inches above the floor for about a minute after the voice had spoken and then vanished.

For a long time they sat in a silence which was broken at last by a faint sound like a prolonged and tremulous sigh. This was followed by a soft rustling as of drapery, and then Mrs Marden felt something like a very small, very soft hand brushing her cheek lightly. She sat quite still, holding her breath. The hand, if it were a hand, touched her twice and surely with tenderness as a child touches its mother. There was a rustling noise succeeded by a sigh. Then a little wind seemed to stir in the room and to die away gently.

Soon afterwards Orwyn's deep voice asked for the lights to be switched on and the sitting was at an end.

On this occasion Orwyn did not invite Mrs Marden to stay behind when the others prepared to go, and she went downstairs with Lady

Terrerton and the two men. She had come in her own car, a large one, and she asked her companions if they would go back with her to Hans Place, to take coffee.

"I should like to have a little talk with you about what has happened to-night," she said, in explanation of her invitation. "It's not much after ten o'clock. But perhaps you have other things to do."

"I'm afraid I must go home," said Lady Terrerton, with a sort of tremulous stiffness which surprised Mrs Marden. "I feel very tired to-night. It was a very fatiguing sitting, I think. The power seemed dissipated somehow. I felt as if there were struggling forces at work. Good-night, Evelyn. Good-night, Mr Burnley—Mr Hammond."

And she got abruptly into the taxicab which was waiting for her and drove away.

The two men said they would go to Hans Place, and they went there with Mrs Marden. They said very little on the way, and what they did say had no relation to the sitting just ended.

Hanson opened the door and did not succeed in hiding an expression of surprise when he saw the two visitors with his mistress.

"I want coffee for three in the library, please,

Hanson. And bring some cigars from the cabinet."

"Yes, Ma'am."

The "cabinet" contained several brands of cigars selected by Ronald and had not been touched since his death.

"Do take off your coats," continued Mrs Marden to the two men. "I'll just leave my things in my room."

She opened the library door and went quickly upstairs.

When Burnley and Hammond were together in the library the latter said,

"Lady Terrerton was very upset to-night."

"Yes," said Burnley.

He put one foot on the fender and looked into the fire.

"Of course she's a mass of nerves," he added.

"How absurd human beings are even in the most intense moments!" observed Hammond, raising his crescent-shaped eyebrows.

Burnley half turned and shot a penetrating glance at him.

"To-night—for instance?" he asked.

"Yes, to-night. Of course you realised that Lady Terrerton was jealous of our hostess. That was why she wouldn't come here with us."

"She may really have been tired."

"She was horribly jealous."

"But it was she who brought Mrs Marden to Orwyn."

"And probably now she wishes she hadn't. My God, Burnley, how absurd we all are!"

He lifted his small hands in a gesture that was almost despairing. "We fight over everything, even over the other world."

The sound of someone coming down the stairs was audible, and Hammond's face suddenly assumed its usual expression of energetic and self-possessed gravity.

Mrs Marden came into the room looking preoccupied and tense. She had taken off her hat and fur coat. She wore a plain black gown high to the throat. Her hair was slightly disordered. Evidently she had not looked into the glass after removing her hat.

"Do sit down," she said, shutting the door.

Her guests obeyed.

"It's a pity Lady Terrerton couldn't come too," she went on, sitting on a big sofa and quickly arranging a cushion behind her. "I'm in deep mourning and see scarcely anyone. But I wanted very much to speak to you all about Mr Orwyn. We cannot remain strangers if we sit together, I think. It seems to me unnatural. There is something to me almost shameless in

our sitting together without knowing anything of each other's real sentiments and opinions, without in fact——"

She broke off and looked at them both with intensity.

"Do you understand what I mean, how I feel about it?" she asked them.

"I think I do," said Burnley.

"Our intimacy so far has been rather like the intimacy of castaways adrift in a boat on the ocean, who knew little of each other on board ship," said Hammond.

At this moment Hanson came in with coffee on a tray and two sorts of cigars.

"The cigars are good, I know," said Mrs Marden. "Ronald, my boy, chose them and he was a fine judge."

She saw Hanson's pale eyes fixed mournfully upon her. When he had left the room she gave her guests coffee.

"Do smoke!" she said.

The two men lighted their cigars.

Mrs Marden, who had made a great effort in going to Hornton Street a second time and sitting with strangers—for she scarcely knew Arthur Burnley—was now carried on, as if by its impetus, into a determined unreserve which astonished herself.

"You spoke of castaways on the ocean, Mr Hammond," she said. "Well, I am one. That is why Lady Terrerton made me come to Mr Orwyn's house, that is the explanation of my joining in these practices. My boy, who was everything to me, was killed in France the other day. I don't care really for anyone else. I have no religion. My occupation till he died was pleasure. It's true I did some so-called work. I managed the programme and souvenir selling at most of the smart charity matinées. But pleasure was my life. Now I do nothing. Your word castaway covers me. But you—and you, Mr Burnley, why do you go to Mr Orwyn's? I daresay I am indiscreet to-night, but I can't help it. I think we ought to know each other's real opinions about the medium and what happens. Of course Diana Terrerton believes in everything. But—you two?"

"I study movements," said Hammond. "There is at present a movement of our world towards occultism. All over London now there are 'circles'. One hears of Lord Arborough's 'circle', of Mrs Enthoven's 'circle', and so on. The religions—at least this is my opinion; it may be wrong—are toppling down. Thousands who never before dreamed of doubting what their pastors and masters told them was

true are sceptical now. The influence of the Bishops is derisory. The clergy clutch at the skirts of those who are fleeing from them. Meanwhile proprietors of weekly papers and writers of sexual romances discover God for the first time, and, raising themselves upon tip-toe, bawl out the marvellous event to the public. Can one stand aside and say there is nothing in this unorthodox human impulse towards the unseen? Is it merely superstition taking the place of religion, a kicking out of the priests to make room for the mediums? Is it neurosis seeking for some alleviation of its misery in change? I think that there is something else besides folly in almost every human manifestation. Why should this widespread movement towards spiritualism be an exception to the general rule? Was Crookes a fool? Are Lodge, Doyle, and other men of their calibre fools? They certainly are not. This war, which is doing so many strange things for the world, is turning frivolous and hitherto materially minded men and women towards the beyond. I turn with them. Euripides said, 'Who knows if life be not death and death be not life?' And I say, too—who knows?"

"And you, Mr Burnley, what do you say?" asked Mrs Marden.

Arthur Burnley took his cigar from his mouth and knocked off the ash slowly.

"I believe in spiritualism," he said. "But not because of the war. I have believed in it for years."

"Then you think Peter Orwyn an absolutely genuine and sincere man?"

"I do."

Mrs Marden looked towards Hammond who was sipping his coffee.

"And what do you think of him?" said Hammond.

"I—I can't believe in it all. But I am naturally a sceptic, I think. Probably I have no imagination."

Hammond smiled.

"I didn't mean it sarcastically," she said. "But imagination seems to me to help people very often over difficult ground. And this is very difficult ground to me."

"Yes?" said Burnley, in an encouraging voice.

"Soon after the war broke out when I was in great anxiety about my boy," she continued, "I went to church."

"Did it help you?" said Burnley.

"Not at all. I felt that I was wasting my time. I'm unable to believe that prayer can

alter or bring about things. And in much the same way I'm unable to believe that Mr Orwyn can cause spirits to come to Hornton Street."

"Then you think Orwyn is an abominable impostor?" said Hammond.

"He doesn't seem to be that at all, and that's the confusing part for me. There seems to me something simple and genuine in Peter Orwyn."

"There is!" said Burnley. "I have known him a long time and I respect him."

"What do you think about him, Mr Hammond?"

"The longer I live, the more I am puzzled by human nature," he answered. "I like Peter Orwyn, but I couldn't tell you half, or a quarter, of what is in him, good or bad. Some of him, I am sure, is quite genuine. Tell me, Mrs Marden"—his eyes had a penetrating look as they gazed at her—"do you feel about these sittings just as you did about church, that they are simply a waste of time?"

"I don't think I feel quite the same."

"What's the difference?"

"I am more interested in the sittings than I was in the church service."

"But how can you be interested at all if you

have no belief at all in the genuine character of the manifestations?"

"There—there is something in them, perhaps, something purely physical, or something that comes from the subconscious mind."

"Ah!" said Burnley. "People nearly always begin by saying that. I did. I was sure the whole thing could be explained, that everything that happened could be referred to us human beings, had to do merely with powers in ourselves which we didn't understand. Thought reading, self-hypnotism. I went through it all. Anything rather than believe that spirits can communicate with us! It's very strange how we struggle against what might be our greatest consolations. Physical starvation demands to be fed, but spiritual starvation, which is ten times worse, very often refuses the food which is brought by the ministering angels. Go on, Mrs Marden, only go on. Be obstinate and some day you will be thankful."

"Please tell me one thing," she said. "Have you ever lost anyone by death, anyone whom you loved?"

"Yes," he said, looking down.

"And you, Mr Hammond?" she asked.

"No," he replied. "But I have suffered

from the losses of my friends. I have known the sorrows of others."

. . . . . .

This conversation made a greater impression upon Mrs Marden than the convictions and assertions of Lady Terrerton. Hammond and Arthur Burnley differed no doubt in their outlooks, regarded Orwyn and his manifestations from different standpoints. Hammond was the curious enquirer, Burnley the convinced believer. But from both men came to her an impulse driving her on. And she went on.

Enquiry brought her the information from Lady Terrerton that each visit to Orwyn cost a guinea. She sent him at once a cheque for two guineas. While she was writing it doubts assailed her again. She had plenty of money, but this payment disgusted her, disgusted something delicate in her soul. But she thought of church and the bag going round while the sidesmen—or whatever they were called—looked at the horizon. All food, whether destined for stomach or spirit, must be paid for, it seemed. She did not condemn the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope of Rome; she had no right to condemn Peter Orwyn. As Lady Terrerton had said people must live, and taxation, already very high, was likely to go higher. But she

wished Peter Orwyn didn't make a profession of occultism.

She told Miss King what had happened in Hornton Street in detail. Miss King listened with deep interest and without interrupting her.

"What's your opinion about it, Miss King?" Mrs Marden asked, when she had finished.

"One thing strikes me."

"What is it?"

"When the face appeared Lady Terrerton thought it was her son."

"Yes."

"Did you think it was like your son's face?"

"There was a suggestion of—of a young soldier in it, I think. But I could not have recognised it. And I'm sure Lady Terrerton couldn't."

"And the voice which spoke to you on both occasions?"

"I certainly thought it resembled my son's way of speaking. But—but the voices and the ways of speaking of young officers are very much alike, I think. In fact I know they are."

She paused, then added,

"I'm not so credulous as Lady Terrerton. Do you know it seems almost incredible but I am sure she is angry with me because the face

which came was not for her. Oh, how absurd it all is! One feels positively ashamed."

Suddenly she began to laugh—then stopped.

"Oh, what wretched paltry creatures we are!" she exclaimed. "Even in our sorrows we are ridiculous. We are ridiculous in everything. Human dignity! Is there such a thing? Where is it then?"

"I think there is a good deal of it to be found on the battlefields of France," said Miss King in her clear quiet voice. "And also on the seas."

Mrs Marden's white cheeks, where lines were beginning to show, flushed.

"If I can arrange it will you come one night to a sitting with Peter Orwyn?" she said.

"Yes; I should like to very much."

"He can know nothing about you."

"Oh no. I never heard of him till you told me."

"I'll try to manage it later on. I think you have a very clear head and good judgment. Lady Terrerton would believe anything, and perhaps I am too much the other way. I don't know. It's difficult to be perfectly balanced, especially in these awful times."

Several weeks went by. The cult for occultism, as most people called it, increased rapidly

in London. It was almost impossible to take up a popular newspaper without finding some mention of it. There were prosecutions of fortune-tellers and hand-readers; a woman who read fates in a crystal ball was heavily fined; a man who kept a prayer shop was exposed in the columns of the most widely read paper in England. Controversies arose between those who believed in New Thought, in protective prayer, paid for at so much an hour, in spiritualism, hand-reading, crystal-gazing, fortune-telling by cards, and those who were bitterly contemptuous of both new faiths and ancient superstitions. Scientists, physicians, clergymen, soldiers, and of course many women took part in the clamour, which proved at least one thing, that an enormous number of people was seeking solace from the agony of the war not in orthodox religion but in what the unbelievers called "mystery mongering". And among these seekers there were women and men of all classes, of all types of intellect, of all degrees of education. Sorrow, fear, anxiety, longing, abolished artificial differences, created a Democracy of desire, in which the eternal child that dwells in the toughest fighting man, the most complex woman, showed its eager face plainly and made its voice clearly heard.

Prosecutions, attacks, the diatribes of medical men, Catholic Priests, Protestant Clergymen, had no effect on the increasing band of those who were reaching out vaguely, or frantically, with trembling wonder, or imperious determination, or mystical reverence, or mere crass superstition, towards regions where war and death and torture were not, or were supposed not to be—the human intellect probably not being able to conceive of another world tormented as ours is tormented. Ridicule cannot kill faith, and superstition is scarcely less tough in fibre than faith, though the one is sublime and the other absurd. So, as the horrors of the war increased the adherents of occultism grew in number. Doctors gravely declared that neurosis was spreading like an epidemic. Acute social observers found that at least two thirds of the people they came in contact with were no longer completely sane. The clergy feared that the power of the Church was tottering.

And there were men who talked of a new religion which would grow up on a basis not of faith but of ascertained facts.

And—Mrs Marden? In the midst of the turmoil she had almost stealthily advanced along the mysterious path.

From Lady Terrerton she had become estranged through no fault of hers. Her poor friend once so anxious to hand on her blessings to a sister in misfortune, had evidently miscalculated her powers of unselfishness. They did not, it seemed, extend beyond the limits of this world. This fact quickly became obvious in subsequent sittings which took place in Hornton Street. On more than one occasion Lady Terrerton was unable to control her bitterness when manifestations occurred which had nothing to do with her, but apparently everything to do with Mrs Marden. It was evident that grief and the effort to assuage it in séances had produced in her a disagreeable form of hysteria. And finally she refused to "sit" any more in the company of Mrs Marden, whom she indirectly accused of laying claim to messages, and even to materialisations, which were obviously intended for herself.

The whole matter was painful and also ridiculous. It was impossible for anyone with a sense of humour to argue or protest about it. Mrs Marden did neither. She quietly said she would not join Lady Terrerton's "circle" in Hornton Street again, and drove home scarcely knowing whether to weep or to laugh over poor human nature.

On that evening she resolved to give up the whole thing. She felt painfully disgusted and humiliated by the scene she had passed through. It seemed to bring Peter Orwyn, all that happened through him or by means of him, and all those who sat with him, into contempt. Mrs Marden's sense of humour laughed certainly, but the laugh was bitter; and her self-respect writhed almost abjectly. She said to herself that she had been a fool and that now her folly had been chastised not with whips but with scorpions. Well, she had had her lesson. Now there was an end of it. She was thankful to be released from the compulsion of practices which were detestable because really they made a mock of the deepest longings, the most yearning aspirations of suffering humanity. She thanked Diana Terrerton for having brought her to her senses.

But presently she found that she missed the evenings in Hornton Street. The séances had taken place twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays. When these nights recurred Mrs Marden, thinking of the circle in Peter Orwyn's house, felt jealous. She sat alone in Hans Place wondering what was happening in that narrow upstairs room with the locked door. A strange feeling of desertion, of much greater,

almost unbearable loneliness, took possession of her. She realised that she felt the loss of her boy much more now that she no longer visited Hornton Street. And this made her realise something else, that the sittings had meant more to her than she had ever allowed even to herself. Then she thought minutely and steadily of all that had happened in the series of sittings, and presently she knew what it was that she missed now that she had broken away from the circle.

It was a voice, the voice which had spoken out of the dark at her first sitting, and which had said at least a few words at every succeeding sitting. Gradually she had come to care for this voice, to wait for it anxiously through the other demonstrations. And many times she had spoken to it, had carried on brief dialogues with it. And each time this voice had seemed to her to resemble more closely the voice of her dead boy. She had never acknowledged a belief that this voice was indeed her boy's, or that what it said came from him in another world. The most that she had ever allowed was that the whole matter was very strange and that she was unable to understand it. And she had been completely sincere. For she had never even to

herself, in her most intense moments of longing, said, "I believe Ronald comes back to me through Peter Orwyn."

Ronald was dead. He must be dead, all of him. Or if he were not all dead then whatever was left of him—and surely there could be nothing—was utterly remote. Nevertheless she missed terribly the séances in Hornton Street, missed hearing that voice in the dark, missed her conversations with it.

Why?

Perhaps she, too, was one of those many women who find comfort in nonsense. Once she had found comfort in wearing new hats and selling souvenirs in theatres. She thought she was utterly changed now. But was she essentially changed? Or was she still a fool, only a fool in a different way?

In those conversations the voice had told her various things, but there had been nothing deep, nothing mystical, in what it had said. The mind shown had been quite ordinary. But then Ronald's had been quite an ordinary mind! The voice had really talked much as a young man of Ronald's type might have talked when something had made him unusually serious, when fate had removed his ordinary pleasures and

activities from him. And—she thought now—it was perhaps just that ordinariness which had impressed her.

Evidently she must have been impressed or she could not now feel as she did, feel this intense longing to go back to Hornton Street.

Peter Orwyn did not communicate with her. She did not see Lady Terrerton any more. Cecil Hammond and Arthur Burnley had dropped out of her life as abruptly as they had come into it.

Loneliness increased upon her. But the obstinacy which was part of her for some time prevented her from yielding to her desire. She was fighting what she called (to herself) her own folly.

"I won't be one of the silly women!" she said to herself. "I may have been silly when I was happy, but I won't be silly in my misery."

And she tried to go on somehow. She began to see a few people. She went about a little. Now and then she attended a concert. But she never went to a theatre. Various friends who thought she was "getting over" her loss tried to persuade her to take up again her "work" at the matinées. She was even asked to appear as "The Mother" in a war pageant at a great

music hall. But she refused all these requests. She couldn't go back to her former way of life. But she seemed unable to go forward into any other way of life that was worth living. So she simply stagnated.

At last, however, she could hold out no longer. The desire to see Peter Orwyn again overpowered her, and, still contemptuous of her own folly, she wrote him a note asking him to come and see her in Hans Place. He answered politely fixing a time. She immediately sent for Miss King, and begged her to come and meet him.

"I always intended to take you to a séance, but somehow it never came off," she said. "Lady Terrerton was so difficult about everything. But I think you are very clear-sighted. I want you to come and meet Mr Orwyn and to tell me exactly what you think of him."

Miss King said she would be glad to come.

"I'll see him first for a few minutes," said Mrs Marden. "Come at a quarter to five on Friday. He's coming about half past four."

On the Friday when Peter Orwyn walked into the room with his rather heavy tread Mrs Marden felt almost painfully strung up and excited.

Orwyn greeted her with his usual quiet, earnest, and yet matter-of-fact manner and made no allusion to the break in their intercourse. He did not ask her why she had sent for him or show any eagerness in meeting her again.

After a few commonplace remarks Mrs Marden enquired about his soldier son.

"He's been made Captain," said Peter Orwyn impressively. "He joined as a simple private and has worked his way up."

"How splendid! You must be proud of him."

"I am indeed. I pray for him every day and have no fear at all for his safety."

"I came to feel rather like that about my boy," said Mrs Marden. "And yet he was killed."

"Whatever happens to Harry I shall not be disturbed or distressed," said Orwyn firmly. "Even if he were to be killed I should not lose him."

Mrs Marden sat looking fixedly at him. She was remembering her thought by the fire about the test. This man looked very sincere. And surely if he were not sincere he could not speak like that about one whom he certainly loved and who must be often in danger.

"You would lose his bodily presence for so long as you lived on earth," she said. "Is that nothing?"

"It is a great deal. And yet how very little when we remember that the spirit is what we love in anyone, and that the spirit is not lost to us."

She was silent and moved her hands restlessly. He said nothing more and sat still looking at her.

"Mr Orwyn, I want to come to Hornton Street again," she said at length, with a sort of half-ashamed reluctance.

"Why?" he asked.

"I have nothing to do and I miss the sittings."

"Do you look upon them as a form of diversion then?" he said, she thought rather severely.

"I miss them. That is all I can say. Will you allow me to come again?"

"I don't know why I should have any objection. I wish to be helpful. But to tell the truth, Mrs Marden, I don't quite understand your attitude towards me."

"I wish to sit with you again; but not with Lady Terrerton of course—after what happened."

"Yes, yes. She was carried away, poor lady."

"I wish you to allow me to bring a friend, a Miss King. She is coming here in a moment."

"Is she a believer?"

"She has never been to a sitting. She believes in a future life."

Orwyn made no comment on this but said, after a slight pause,

"My impression is that you believe much more than you admit to yourself, Mrs Marden. I think you are one of those who struggle against their own tendencies to believe, even perhaps against their own secret convictions as if those convictions were enemies."

"Why do you think so?" she said, reddening.

"I know it is so!" he exclaimed.

"How can you know?"

"Because, with your type of character and brain, if it were not so you would not wish to have anything more to do with me. If you really thought me an impostor you would have done with me long ago, and quite rightly. Something obstinate, something perverse in you, tries not to believe, but you *do* believe."

He spoke with powerful authority, looking steadily at her.

"I cannot believe that spirits play the con-

certina," she said. "Why should they do such a thing?"

"As a means of making known their presence."

"But I don't want to be convinced of it in such a way."

"What is it that draws you back to the sittings then?"

She looked down. The flush was still on her face.

"It's a—a voice," she murmured.

"Yes?"

"I miss it. I seem more lonely without it."

"It must be the voice of your son," he said, with deep gravity. "Thank God, if I have been enabled to be the channel through which it has uttered words of comfort to you."

"I don't say it is. I don't know at all—but I want to hear it again. I——"

Before she could say anything more Miss King was announced.

Mrs Marden saw Orwyn cast a penetrating glance at the secretary as she came in. He was surely a shrewd judge of character, she thought. She introduced him to Miss King and they talked together for a few minutes. Peter Orwyn was rather communicative, but Mrs Marden noticed that Miss King, while seemingly frank

and friendly in manner and words, gave no information about herself, her circumstances, her private affairs, to the medium. When he spoke of his sons she listened with sympathy but no mention of relations or friends came from her. She was evidently on her guard.

Presently Orwyn's curious profession was alluded to and Mrs Marden asked if a sitting could be arranged for her and Miss King. Orwyn looked rather dubious.

"I don't know—I don't think there would be enough power," he said. "I should need a fourth person to complete the circle. Perhaps Mr Burnley would come. You would have no objection, I suppose?"

"No," said Mrs Marden. "I like Mr Burnley."

"Very well. I will see if I can arrange it."

And he turned the conversation to the subject of the war. It seemed to Mrs Marden that he was perhaps trying to discover whether Miss King had suffered any loss through it. He did not ask her any questions, or show any curiosity, but he gave Miss King two or three openings for information which she did not take advantage of.

When he had said good-bye and gone away Mrs Marden said,

"Do you like him?"

"I think I do."

"Does he inspire you with confidence?"

"He looks a genuine sort of man."

"I noticed that you were very careful not to tell him anything about yourself. That was wise of you. Did you think he was trying to find out anything?"

"I don't know that he was. But I daresay people do often tell mediums a good deal, perhaps almost unconsciously. From what I have heard a good many hand-readers learn from their clients almost as much as they tell them."

"I wonder if I am a fool to begin again," said Mrs Marden. "But oh, Miss King, one does long so to catch on to something!"

She got up and moved restlessly about the room.

"I would give anything to be convinced that my boy is still alive somewhere!" she exclaimed. "That he still thinks of me, wants me. I want him so terribly."

Suddenly she broke down and cried.

"Without any belief, any hope, such grief as mine is unbearable," she said, desperately through her tears. "And yet—I don't want to be deceived. But sometimes I would give

anything almost not to have that cold something in the brain which resists what might be consolation. *He* says I secretly do believe, but that I am perverse and fight against my own convictions. I wonder if I do?"

She gazed almost hungrily at Miss King. Her tear-stained face looked quite old. The secretary got up, took her hand gently and kissed her.

"Something will come to give you help," she said. "I am sure of that. And perhaps it will come when you least expect it, and from the last quarter where you would be likely to look for it. That often happens. Sometimes a very little thing, what seems a mere trifle, brings about a great change in a human being. So it may be with you. But I wish you would pray for it."

"He says he prays."

"Mr Orwyn?"

"Yes."

"I shall pray for you," said Miss King. "It may do no good. I can't tell. But when I look at you I feel I must do it."

Mrs Marden squeezed her hand almost convulsively and then hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER VI

Some weeks later Mrs Marden felt that the great change spoken of by Miss King had come to her, though not perhaps from the last quarter where she was likely to look for it. Arthur Burnley had told her to be obstinate, to go on. She had obeyed him. She had been obstinate in sitting with Peter Orwyn when she was sceptical, doubtful, wondering, when finally she was wavering between unbelief and belief. And at last she had been rewarded. Gradually in repeated sittings her desire to believe had grown in strength till it had become almost an obsession. Each time the lights were switched off in Orwyn's narrow room, and darkness swallowed up the medium and his companions, she said to herself silently, but with urgency, "I want to believe, I want to believe." Each time the young soldier-like voice spoke she listened to it more acutely, straining her ears, asking herself, "Is it his voice? Could it be the voice of some other young

soldier, of any typical young soldier? Or has it the individual, the absolutely personal quality which only my boy's voice had?" And she strove to find testing questions to ask it. She spoke to it of small matters known only to Ronald and herself, and several times she obtained replies containing allusions to intimate things, little jokes, little happenings in which Ronald and she had shared.

One night an absurd memory rose in her mind.

She had gone with Ronald to Covent Garden to see a performance of the Russian ballet. The ballet was "Thamar." Two elderly ladies, evidently sisters, had sat just in front of them, and during the barbaric terrors of the very un-English story so fiercely brought out by the incomparable company, had continually made comments described by Ronald as "priceless". At the close of the ballet when Karsavina, raising her weary form on the great pile of cushions, had gazed with her dark and lustful eyes towards the ravine where travellers passed by her castle, had lifted herself up, raised her white arm, and waved slowly the beckoning handkerchief, one of the sisters had exclaimed to the other,

"Where is her sense of shame, Mary? Why

the other one has hardly had time to get cold yet, and there she is at it again!"

"You may well ask!" the other had replied. "Now if you or I were to use *our* handkerchiefs for any such purposes *we* should soon have to answer to the police. Nice doings, I must say!"

And thereupon the two had risen and trampled virtuously in the direction of Bow Street.

And then Mrs Marden and Ronald had given themselves up to laughter.

With this memory in her mind Mrs Marden said to the voice,

"Do you remember what happened when we went to the Russian ballet together to see 'Thamar'?"

There was a short silence. Then the laugh came out of the darkness, the hearty laugh of a young man.

"Shall I ever forget it?" said the voice. And again the laugh sounded through the room.

At that moment Mrs Marden was convinced. Something within her said, "That laugh was Ronald's. It is Ronald's voice that speaks. He does come. He does talk to me. It isn't all nonsense. It isn't imagination! I'm

not being tricked and I'm not tricking myself."

The change within her, which she thought had taken place abruptly, was tremendous, like a blow, shattering mercilessly the resistance of that cold thing in her brain, shattering her perversity, breaking down the barriers which she had set up, or which had been set up by her own temperament without her will being concerned in the matter, between herself and the happiness she had never thought to possess. It was as if what had been ice suddenly melted and warm streams gushed forth. She was physically affected as people often are who undergo what is called conversion. She trembled; her heart beat violently; her hands and her head were hot as if fever had taken hold of her.

She did not tell Peter Orwyn what had happened to her that night. Possibly, however, he divined it. She thought those dark steady eyes of his could look deep into people. He was not a very well educated man, but he was naturally intelligent, and had seen many human beings stirred by emotion. He surely could not miss the almost wild movement of her soul. But in truth she cared very little either way just then.

She went away from Orwyn's house with Miss King and Arthur Burnley. It was late springtime now.

"Let us walk home," she said.

"But I ought to take the train at the High Street Station," said Miss King.

"Come home with me and I'll put you up for the night," said Mrs Marden.

But I've got nothing with me!"

"I'll give you all you need. Do come. I want you to-night."

"Thank you. Then I will come."

They walked on down the quiet street and turned the corner into the busier High Street of Kensington. Because it was wartime the lamps were darkened. In a gloom that was sombre, almost sinister, the taxicabs went carefully by. Pedestrians, most of them with anxious, preoccupied faces—there had been many air raids on London—trod cautiously through the blackness going to houses which might be smashed to pieces at any moment. There was the uneasiness of war in the atmosphere although the enemy was on the other side of the sea.

Mrs Marden had often felt the war darkness of London at night like a heavy load laid upon her individually and bending her

towards the abyss. A nausea of depression had come upon her many times as she made her way home from Peter Orwyn's. For generally she had been conscious of a strong reaction after the sittings, which had marked the physical excitement engendered by them. To-night the war darkness was there but it no longer pressed her down. She seemed able to pierce through it and to catch a glimpse of something beyond. Formerly she had looked at the shadow pedestrians moving through the obscure London ways with a feeling of abject pity which had included herself. They were doomed and she too was doomed. That had been her thought. Now she saw them as travellers passing onwards through temporary darkness towards eventual light, and though pity did not utterly die in her it was mitigated. For she felt, as she supposed all truly religious people felt, that the misery of life, like the blackness of night, would end in a brilliance, in joy, in dawn. What a marvellous difference that feeling made, changing the whole world in a moment! She remembered Peter Orwyn's words, "You are being educated; that's all." She had heard them with a sense of almost bitter contempt, even of impotent anger, without any belief

in their truth. But he had known more than she had. And even Diana Terrerton had known more, in spite of her pitiable hysteria. Suddenly Mrs Marden was passionately grateful to Lady Terrerton; she had wanted to hand on her blessings and she had done it.

"I must tell her!" Mrs Marden said to herself. "To-morrow I'll tell her."

She was walking between her two companions in silence. Now she looked at Miss King. As she did so Miss King looked at her and said,

"What is it?"

"I feel happy to-night. And it's—it's so extraordinary to feel happy again. I never thought——"

She stopped speaking; she could not go on. Tears had come into her eyes. She turned towards Arthur Burnley. He was walking with his eyes looking straight ahead, apparently immersed in thought. After taking a moment to regain complete control of her emotion she said,

"Mr Burnley, you were right."

His keen eyes searched her for an instant in the obscurity. Then he said,

"You have got rid of your scepticism!"

"Yes."

"It was a disease in you. Now you're sound."

"But why has it gone so suddenly? I can't understand."

"We never can. We aren't meant to. I don't know why. We are as ignorant in our joy as we are in our misery. But, mind, I don't say I agree with you."

"What do you mean?"

"About the suddenness. I think you have been very slowly drawn along to the truth. That's often the way. We travel towards a goal without being aware that we are moving. The soul isn't like the body. It's finer, but duller, too. It's deceived, or it deceives itself, much oftener than the body is deceived, or deceives. I've felt your progress and I'm not a bit surprised. But then I've trodden the same path as you have."

Miss King had been listening to this conversation intently. Now she said,

"I'm very thankful for you, Mrs Marden."

There was something in her tone which went to her friend's heart. Mrs Marden and she had of course many times discussed all that had happened in Hornton Street, and Miss King's invariable conclusion about the manifestations had been that she couldn't make up

her mind what their origin was. She, like Mrs Marden, was unable to believe that Orwyn was a charlatan. She liked him; she thought him sincere. But on the other hand she thought it probable that he was self-deceived about his own powers and capacities. She had a methodical mind, and was by nature very thorough in everything she undertook. She applied her brains with a sort of calm and unhumourous energy to the task in hand, whatever it was. And she had done this to the Hornton Street task, noting carefully everything that occurred with a still determination not to be "carried away", yet without any of the obstinacy which led Mrs Marden often to resistance and distrust of impressions. In her leisure hours, when the day's work was done, and she was alone in her little rooms, she had read several standard works dealing with occultism, psychical research and the strange powers of the subconscious mind. One of them, written by a brilliant and logical American, had greatly impressed her. And, though always open-minded and indeed anxious to believe, she was inclined to think that Orwyn was a genuine man with genuine powers possessed by very few people, who perhaps, indeed probably,

mistook the nature of his own powers, and attributed to released spirits occurrences which in reality had their origin in mysterious, but purely human, energies which he knew nothing of. Since she had joined in the sittings there had been few of those manifestations which have been laughed at by the incredulous world for years, which have been reproduced by conjurers and exposed by clever and cynical men to the delight of sensation lovers. The instruments of music had lain hidden in Peter Orwyn's bureau. The luminous faces had not been visible. But the table had turned and risen from the floor; rappings had been audible; lights had flashed; voices had spoken; and Peter Orwyn had several times written automatically. When apparently entranced he had also answered questions addressed to him by the sitters. All this had deeply interested Miss King, but she had never felt convinced, she did not feel convinced now, that spirit agencies had been at work using the medium. On the other hand she did not feel positive that such agencies could have had nothing to do with the manifestations.

One thing, however, she had specially remarked; and that was that scarcely anything which occurred seemed to have any reference

to herself. So far as she was aware Peter Orwyn still knew nothing whatever about her except that she was the secretary, and now the friend, of Mrs Marden. She had never been tempted to depart from the rigid reserve about her private life which she had shown when she had first made Orwyn's acquaintance. She liked him; she had always been friendly, even cordial, to him; but she had never told him anything. Had this reserve of hers had anything to do with the medium's reserve towards herself, displayed by the absence of reference to her life and her longings from the revelations in Hornton Street?

She had often wondered about this; she wondered about it now.

As they walked on together, skirting Kensington Gardens and the Park, Mrs Marden and Burnley talked together, and Miss King now and then joined in. But that night for the first time she felt a little "out of it" with these two, as a sceptic may feel when in company with ardent believers. She was glad, she was even thankful, at the change in her friend, but she could not help wishing she shared it.

Burnley walked with them as far as Hans Place and then said good-night. He refused

to enter the house. As he shook hands with Miss King he said to her,

"Miss King, I like your sincerity. You neither rush forward into things, nor hold back from them. You will never be a victim."

"A victim, Mr Burnley!" she said, blushing slightly.

"Either of credulity or scepticism. I think three quarters of the world are the victims of one or the other. Good-night, Mrs Marden. This has been a great night!"

He shook her hand warmly.

"Getting to truth—it's like warming cold hands at a fire, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said.

He took off his hat and walked away into the darkness.

As the two women went into the house Mrs Marden said,

"He's right about you, Emily. Are you still doubtful?"

"I still feel as I have always felt. But I am thankful for the change in you."

"I can scarcely understand it. It's all come so suddenly."

"No, I don't think so. I've been expecting it for some time."

Mrs Marden stood still in the hall.

"Have you gone on praying about me?"

"Yes."

"Can it be that? Have I been wrong, perhaps, in all my disbeliefs?"

There was deep enquiry in her eyes as she looked at her friend.

"To-night everything seems different," she added. "It's so wonderful to feel sure that Ronald is alive. Tell me, are you convinced that the man you loved is alive somewhere?"

"Yes. But I was convinced of that before I went to Mr Orwyn's."

"And going has made no difference at all to you?"

"None at all about anything of that kind."

"It was an instinct that told you?"

"Yes."

"And I had no such instinct and yet now I believe. How utterly different you and I must be!"

"Yes, I suppose we are."

That evening they sat together for a long time before going to bed. Miss King listened with the liveliest sympathy to Mrs Marden's expression of the new-found happiness, and yet, strangely, perhaps, all the time they were sitting together she felt that she, unconverted by Peter Orwyn, was more firmly anchored

to truth than her friend now converted. No one had come to her in Peter Orwyn's room; no voice had spoken to her. The man whom she loved and had lost had given her no sign that he was now anything but the dust of what had once been a humble hero. But within her, far down in the depth of her, she held a certainty that the life given so readily, almost indeed with eagerness, for a man's native land, had not been lost but found when the body fell. And she knew that no event in her own life could rob her of this certainty or destroy it in her. Was Mrs Marden, even now, as safe as she was; she who did not need the strange happenings at any séance to make her believe? Some words from the Bible came into her mind: "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed". She could not help at that moment applying them to herself, and drawing a mental comparison between Thomas and Mrs Marden, who having heard had at last come to belief. Mrs Marden had a great deal more of most of the things thought desirable by the average man and woman than she, humble Emily King, had. And now this conviction that she had spoken with the dead, had had a direct proof of the after existence was added to her. Yet Emily King felt

herself to be the richer, the more fortunate of the two women linked in intimacy by misfortune. So great is it not to need proof! So great is it to guide your course by the stars instead of by the lights men can kindle and men can put out!

It was in the summer of that year that Peter Orwyn's name became notorious in the newspapers. Cecil Hammond was the originator of the campaign which caused such heartburning and anger in spiritualistic circles. He was as he had said a keen student of the various movements of his time, and was not to be deterred by sarcasm or even by ridicule from going deeply into any subject that engaged the attention of his hungry mind. But he was a man who could be as ruthless as he was intellectually inquisitive, and there was nothing he hated so much as being made a fool of. There was a good deal of conceit in his composition, and if his conceit were injured he was capable of being very disagreeable, at times even dangerous.

Mrs Marden had not seen Hammond again since her sittings with Lady Terrerton had come to an end, but his view of Orwyn had never led her to expect that he would, in the common phrase, "turn against" him. Con-

sequently she was both surprised and shocked when one day Burnley told her that Hammond had become the sworn enemy of those who practised spiritualism, and especially of Peter Orwyn.

"Why?" she asked.

"He has come to the conclusion that Orwyn is a charlatan and a danger to society," said Burnley. "Hammond knows all sorts of people. Some time ago he made the acquaintance of Larrington."

"Larrington! do you mean the famous conjurer?"

"Yes. And Larrington, it seems, has convinced him that Orwyn's manifestations can all be reproduced by ingenious trickery!"

"They can't. There can be no trick which could cause voices which we know to speak to us."

"Of course not. But Hammond is determined to get up a campaign against the whole thing, and especially against Orwyn."

"Does Mr Orwyn know?"

"Yes."

"Is he—how does he take it?"

"He seems quite undisturbed so far as he personally is concerned. But he seems vexed and anxious on account of his son."

"Captain Orwyn?"

"Yes. His son has done, and is doing, splendidly in the war, and it would be hard on him to have his father publicly held up to contempt. You know what it is in a regiment. I'm disgusted with Hammond, but there's no stopping him, I'm afraid."

He looked at her, and she saw by his expression that he was considering something with which his mind connected her.

"I can't stop him," he said.

"Do you think anyone else could?"

"I wonder."

"Lady Terrerton——"

"Oh no! He thinks her a fool."

"Probably he thinks all women are fools."

"He's too clever for that."

"What is it?" she asked.

"Well, Orwyn wondered whether you could do something. You were a long time in being convinced, but he did convince you. That might possibly weigh with Hammond."

"I'll see Mr Hammond," she said with decision. "I owe everything to Mr Orwyn. He has changed my whole life. I would try anything for him. And I know what he feels for his son. Where does Mr Hammond live?"

Burnley told her.

"I'll do my utmost to stop him," she said.

She wrote to Cecil Hammond that day and asked him to come and see her. She was quite frank about her reason for wishing to meet him again. He answered politely by return of post fixing an hour for a call, and punctually to the moment he walked into her drawing-room.

"I'm glad to meet you again, Mr Hammond," she said, greeting him cordially.

He smiled.

"That's good of you! Especially as I'm afraid we are now in opposite camps."

"I think you and I can even be in opposite camps without being personal enemies," she said lightly.

His observant eyes were fixed upon her, and she noticed an expression of surprise flit over his clever face.

"You are wondering," she said. "I know why."

"Why then?"

"Because I am looking so much happier than I was when you saw me last."

"Perhaps that is it."

She sat down not far from a window.

"I can bear the light on me now," she said. "That means a good deal."

He sat near her.

"You know why I want to have a talk with you," she continued. "It's about Mr Orwyn. You have become his enemy."

"Hardly that."

"His opponent then."

"I'm the opponent of all flagrant insincerity," he said inflexibly.

"That's a man's part, I think. But now tell me something. And please be sincere yourself. Do you think me a fool?"

"My dear Mrs Marden!"

"No, no! Do you?"

"I do not."

"Really I am not as determined to believe all I should like to believe as Diana Terrerton is."

"Oh—Lady Terrerton!" He paused. "I know that," he added.

"She and I are friends again," said Mrs Marden. "I am grateful to her."

"She is a very kind, foolish woman. And that's to her credit!"

"Yes. I wish you would tell me why you are determined to attack Mr Orwyn."

"I will. It's because I have become convinced that he makes money by trickery."

"How have you become convinced?"

He replied by another question.

"How have you become convinced that the manifestations he produces are genuine, are what he claims that they are?"

She hesitated for a moment.

"It's very difficult to explain in a sensible way," she said. "I think I almost resisted my own inclination to believe. I hated so many of the manifestations. They seemed to me ridiculous. I even told Mr Orwyn so."

"What did he say to that?"

"Well, he didn't say much. But—those manifestations ceased."

"Ah!"

"He didn't bring out the tambourine and those other things. He didn't enter the cabinet."

"You mean you didn't sit any more for manifestations?"

"No, we didn't."

"Very accommodating of Mr Orwyn! Now let me tell you something before you go on. Larrington, the conjurer, is an acquaintance of mine. I have got to know him very well lately. He has reproduced for me in private everything Orwyn does at the séances; the feats of levitation, the appearances, the floating tambourine, the flashing lights, the rappings on

pictures and furniture, the touching hands—everything. And not only that. Under the seal of secrecy he has shown me exactly how all these things are done."

"Mr Larrington cannot have reproduced everything Mr Orwyn accomplishes,—no, that is the wrong word—I mean everything that happens at the séances. What convinced me was a voice."

"Oh—the voices!"

He spoke with a strong note of contempt.

"Mr Hammond, do you mean to tell me you can't recognise the voice of anyone you care for?"

"Voices are often very much alike."

"Wouldn't you recognise even my voice, which you haven't heard very often, in the dark? Can't we recognise voices even when they speak through the telephone—not always but very often?"

"Your voice, Mrs Marden, happens to be very distinctive, as Ellen Terry's voice is, but as only comparatively few voices are. And they, I have remarked, are usually the voices of women. Take actors, for instance. I know the English stage pretty well, but I doubt if I should be certain to recognise with my eyes shut the voices of the actors I have heard again

and again. I will make one exception. Charles Wyndham had a voice so peculiar that I think I could have been practically certain it was his if I had heard it without seeing him."

"But the voice of somebody one—one loves!"

"I don't think love is always accurate in its perceptions. Besides—forgive me—you heard a voice with me several times without being convinced."

"Yes, I know. But I always thought it like my boy's voice."

"The voices of young soldiers are extraordinarily alike. Haven't you noticed that? If you belonged to any club they frequent—such as the Bath Club for instance—you would certainly have remarked it."

"I have remarked it. I thought exactly as you do. I was very reluctant to believe. I think I even fought against a growing conviction that I was listening to—to my son's voice."

"May I ask how you became convinced?"

"It seemed to be quite sudden. One night I *knew!*"

"But what made you know? That's the point."

"It wasn't desire. Or I should have known, or thought I knew, much sooner."

Hammond pursed his firm lips.

"Why does one know a thing suddenly?" she said. "How can I explain? Light seems to break on one. Conviction comes like a thief in the night."

"It seems to have been as abrupt as St. Paul's conversion," he observed, with a faint smile. "But then conversion sometimes shakes a crowd at a revival meeting, doesn't it? And I'm afraid that doesn't prove very much."

"You think I'm a victim of hysteria, perhaps?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. But I have come to the conclusion that séances are very unwholesome, that they act noxiously upon the body in many cases, and through the body influence the mind. These mediums, I'm sure, are aware of that, count upon it as a point in their favour. Most evil things breed best in the dark."

"I know my son has spoken to me," she said simply.

"I am sure you are quite genuine in your conviction."

"But that doesn't convince you at all."

"I'm afraid it doesn't."

"I don't know why it should really. But I thought I ought to tell you."

"Has this voice ever said anything extraordinary to you? Has it ever given you what you might consider an absolute proof of identity?"

"It has spoken of things only my son and I knew."

"But *you* knew them!"

"You think Mr Orwyn is a thought-reader?"

"There are scientific men, I understand, who deny the possibility of telepathy. But I have convinced myself that telepathy is possible, and that many of these mediums are thought-readers. The same thing may be said of all successful hand-readers, I believe. Has that voice ever told you anything about your son which you did not know, and which you were afterwards able to ascertain was true in every particular?"

After a pause she said,

"I don't think—I don't remember that it has."

"Then it hasn't. Now if I were you I should try to get such a proof, but I am afraid you never will. And now tell me, —what do you think about all these demonstrations of Orwyn's which a conjurer can reduplicate in every particular?"

"I suppose even a genuine manifestation

might in some cases be imitated by means of a trick."

"Then you don't think that that part of Orwyn's performance, or whatever you like to call it, was accomplished by trickery?"

"I don't know. How can I know? But I do know that Mr Larrington could not bring to my ears the voice of my son, or to my—my heart the certainty that he was speaking to me. No conjurer could ever do that."

"I see you are really of the faith," said Hammond. "Well, I ought not to be surprised. Nothing in human beings ought to surprise us. An atheist turns believer. A monk flees the monastery and preaches the negation of God. I have known the case of a Roman Catholic mother who became a Protestant, abjuring the errors of Rome. She brought up her daughter as a Protestant. At the age of sixteen that daughter verted to the religion the mother had renounced. Lawrence Oliphant, one of the cleverest men of his time, became a follower of the Prophet Harris. Hundreds of thousands believe in Mrs Eddy more than they believe in the Bible. The multitudes of members of 'The League of the Silver Star' look to a lively little Indian in

tweeds, who may be seen lunching at Claridge's, as the reincarnation of the Christ. Even Mark Twain could not kill Christian Science and I shall certainly not be able to kill spiritualism. But the fight is the thing that counts, not the victory."

"Then you are determined to attack Mr Orwyn?"

"I am."

"I want you not to attack him."

"Because you believe in him?"

"He has brought a great happiness into my life."

"I can see that."

"But you want to take it from me?"

"I have no wish to hurt you personally. Why should I? The whole thing is not a question of individuals but simply of what is truth and what is fraud. Besides if what you believe is true and what I believe is false, how can any attack of mine do any harm to you? My experience tells me that any attack upon truth merely brings it more clearly into the light. Therefore if I attack Peter Orwyn and he is genuine his position will be strengthened. I am sure you see that."

"I think you know how to argue much better than I do."

Cecil Hammond crossed his legs looking pleased with himself, but he said politely,

"I really don't think so, Mrs Marden, I really don't think so. You know very well how to stand up for your friends."

"I don't want to argue," she said earnestly. "I wish to make an appeal to you. We differ, I know, about Peter Orwyn, but I'm sure we shall agree about the debt we owe to the men who are fighting for us, to our soldiers in France."

Hammond's eyebrows went up.

"Our soldiers!" he said. "I'm afraid I don't see what they have to do with this question."

"Mr Orwyn has a soldier son. He joined the forces as a Private. He has behaved gallantly. He has done so well that recently he has been made a Captain."

"That's all to his credit. I have nothing against him."

"Of course not. Mr Orwyn, I know, is devoted to this son of his."

"I daresay he is. But Orwyn's private life——"

"I don't ask you to consider Peter Orwyn. But don't you see how cruelly any scandal in which his name was involved must fall upon

this young fellow who is doing his very best for his country, and for all of us? for you and me among the rest? It would shame him in the regiment, among his comrades, among the men he has to lead and look after. I think it absolutely wrong, ungrateful for any one of us who lives in comfort and safety far away from the dangers of this hideous war to do anything that might strike at the fair fame, the authority of any soldier who is fighting our battles, and risking his life every day, every hour for us. I am sure you couldn't wish to do such a thing. When I think of my own boy, of all the boys who have died, and are dying now at this very moment for us, I do feel that we owe it to them to be very careful of their honour and fair fame. Though we can't fight we can at least hold our tongues if to speak out certain things would bring misery and perhaps even shame upon them. I am sure Peter Orwyn has been a devoted Father and is beloved by his son. I daresay even the money he earns is earned rather for his children than for himself."

Cecil Hammond's smooth and rather plump cheeks had slowly reddened during this appeal to his feelings. He had uncrossed his legs and leaned forward, looking down at the carpet.

But now he looked up, and in a hard voice, speaking more loudly than was his custom, he said,

"May I put a question to you?"

"Yes—do."

"Has Mr Orwyn asked you to make this appeal to my feelings?"

It was Mrs Marden's turn to redden.

"He has not personally asked me," she said.

"But he has indirectly?"

"I know it would distress him very much if he were to be the cause of injuring his son at such a moment as this, just as the boy is rising so honourably to the height of his noblest possibilities."

"He wanted you to approach me," said Hammond.

She said nothing.

Hammond sat as if in deep thought for two or three minutes. Then he raised his head, pushed forward his round chin almost aggressively, and said with determination,

"I'm very sorry, but I can't give in to you in this matter. This rage for spiritualism is doing a lot of harm in London. Ask the nerve doctors if it isn't. Swarms of impostors and charlatans are coining money out of the folly and the emotion of the public. These

people are a positive danger to the community, and Peter Orwyn is one of the worst of them. You spoke just now of the money he earned for his children. But do you mean to tell me that if a man is good to his family that excuses him for gaining money by false pretences? Is every criminal to go scot free if he happens to have a son in the army?"

"Mr Orwyn is not a criminal."

"In my opinion he's a swindler, and I mean to go for him."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to attack him in the papers. If he's genuine he can prosecute me for libel. But I'm quite ready to take the risk of that. And Larrington is going to repudiate all his manifestations at St Patrick's Hall for the benefit of the public."

Mrs Marden got up, and Hammond followed her example.

"Very well, Mr Hammond," she said quietly and with no emotion. "I have done my best. I think you are wrong in the line you are taking. But we have different views, and I suppose I have no right to complain of yours. Mr Burnley——"

"Arthur Burnley is a fanatic," interrupted Hammond. "You have only got to look at his

eyes to see that. Even if Orwyn were publicly to confess himself a trickster Burnley wouldn't believe it. But—you would."

He said no more, but shook her by the hand and left her.

CHAPTER VII

HAMMOND'S attack on Peter Orwyn and the spiritualists was not long in coming. It appeared in one of the most widely read London newspapers, informed the public that Larrington, the famous conjurer, had undertaken to reproduce at St Patrick's Hall Peter Orwyn's so-called spirit manifestations, and challenged the medium to come forward on the stage to give a test séance under the severest possible conditions, and in the presence of a committee of six eminent men, whose names were given, and who were quite willing to be convinced of the presence of spirits, if Orwyn, or anyone else, could convince them. Two of these men were famous physicians, one was a writer, one a prominent clergyman, and the remaining two were members of Parliament. In the event of Orwyn's not choosing to take up this challenge Hammond invited him to bring an action for libel against his assailant.

The day after the appearance of the article Mrs Marden paid a visit to Hornton Street and asked if she could see Peter Orwyn. The little maid, who was looking rather scared, said she didn't know, but would see.

"Then Mr Orwyn is at home?" said Mrs Marden.

"Yes, Mum," said the maid, "but there's been so many after him to-day, gentlemen from the papers and photographers. Oh he has been worritted. They want his likeness for the Daily Mirror, Mum, and I don't know what all."

"I'm his friend. I daresay he'll see me. Just ask him."

"Yes, Mum, I know."

She disappeared but soon came back and invited Mrs Marden to come up.

Mrs Marden was shown into the drawing-room where she was alone for a few minutes. She sat by the window looking towards the back part of the room where stood the round table at which she had so often sat in dim light or in darkness. In the bright sunshine the room looked very commonplace. There was no mystery about it. It was rather bare, clean, and without any pretence of luxury, any suggestion of possible hiding-places. It looked like the room of a man moderately well off and quiet unpretentious. Mrs Marden thought it almost touching in its simplicity.

In this narrow chamber what emotions she had felt, what disgust, what weariness, what

trembling anxiety and hope, finally what intensity of joy! Now she sat and stared at it, and remembered Hammond's strange words about Arthur Burnley and herself. If Orwyn were to confess himself a trickster Hammond had said that Burnley wouldn't believe him, and then, fixing his grey eyes upon her, had added—"But—you would!"

Of course she would! She couldn't do otherwise. She was no fanatic. But oh, what an agony it would be to have her belief wrenched from her! Something seemed to clutch at her heart strings at the mere thought of it. Such a thing would be like the coming of death to her.

The coming of death! She thought of her own death, far off no doubt. For she had always been a remarkably healthy woman, and no dangers of battlefields were waiting for her. Again she looked at the table with its polished surface and its rounded pedestal. Then she got up, went over to it, and stood beside it, touching it with the fingers of her right hand. If she were dead and had left behind her on the earth someone who loved her and wanted her terribly could Peter Orwyn summon her here? How could that be? How was such a mystery accomplished? For a moment, while

she thought almost coldly, with a sort of austere severity, her own belief astonished herself. In the shades of the night all things seem so much more possible than in the broad sunlight with the motes dancing in through the open windows. And yet she believed. Her long fingers tapped on the slippery wood. Her eyes were bent down. But presently she raised them. It happened that she was standing exactly opposite to a long narrow mirror of very poor design, which was nailed to the distempered wall. She saw all the upper part of her figure and her face in it. She looked. Then she moved away from the table, went to the mirror, stood before it and looked again, not at her face but at her body.

"Why how thin I am!" she thought.

And she examined herself closely.

She had always had a beautiful figure, but it had been rather voluptuous than fine drawn. There had been nothing sylph-like about it. Grief, she had noticed, had changed her face. But she had never before noticed that her body had been changed. Now she was almost startled. She had certainly been losing flesh lately. Even her gown did not fit her properly. It was too loose on her.

"Why hasn't Henriette said anything?" she thought.

And then suddenly she remembered that one day the maid had begun to say something to her about a gown being too large for her, and that she had exclaimed, rather crossly,

"Oh, don't worry me any more about clothes! I am sick of clothes! I don't care how I look now."

So no doubt Henriette had noticed.

Well, it was natural enough! Ronald's death had brought lines in her face, had stolen away much of her beauty. Now she knew that it had ravaged her figure also. But what did that matter? She no longer lived for the world and the world's opinion. She had travelled away from the masquerade.

But she still stood there and looked at her figure, and there was something of astonishment in her eyes.

She heard the door opened and turned quickly round. Peter Orwyn came in. He looked tired and, she thought, harassed, but he greeted her with his usual quiet self-possession.

"I'm so sorry, so disgusted about this attack on you," she said quickly. "I don't know why Mr Hammond is so bitter, but I think

he's a conceited man, and I suppose he honestly believes he has been taken in."

"Yes, I daresay he does. It's kind of you to come. Sit down, Mrs Marden."

"Thank you. I wanted to show you my sympathy."

"I know."

"And—something else. I wanted to ask you what you are going to do."

Peter Orwyn placed his large capable hands on his broad knees.

"I shall do nothing," he said firmly.

"Nothing?"

"Why—what would you have me do?"

"I don't quite know. But surely such an attack in such a paper requires some answer."

"Would you expect me to appear on a conjurer's platform before a gaping audience and try to bring the departed as witnesses that I am not a swindler? I couldn't do that."

"No, of course not."

"My task is to use my poor powers as a comforter of the bereaved. I am a witness to a great truth. Am I to go upon a platform and let sceptical men tie me up as if I were a malefactor? Am I to enter into a contest with an entertainer? Am I to be given just so many minutes to establish communication with

the world beyond our world? My own powers are a complete mystery to myself. They are not like the powers of a conjurer who practises his tricks, as a dancer practises steps, as a singer practises a part in an opera. Such people know exactly what they can do, and they can be sure of doing it at any time. I can't. I don't even want to. People like Mr Hammond are earthbound. We mustn't blame them,—they can't help it. Those who are in touch with great mysteries are always at a disadvantage in a contest with purely practical people. The mystic lives with God, but can he hold his own in an argument with the village doctor? Probably, I might almost say certainly not. It is better for him to be silent. He *knows,* but it is not given to him to make everyone else know."

He paused. She noticed that drops of perspiration glistened on his forehead. He drew out from the breast pocket of his braided coat a large handkerchief and wiped them away.

"I absolutely understand," she said. "You are right, I'm sure. And you won't prosecute Mr Hammond for libel?"

"How can I? To win my case, to prove that I am not a swindler, I should have to give an exhibition in a court of law."

"But you could bring witnesses."

"Do you think an English Judge and Jury would be convinced by them? Besides, Mr Larrington declares he will do by means of tricks what I do here in this room."

"But he can't do certain things. He can't do what has convinced me."

"It would be no use to prosecute," said Orwyn, "and Mr Hammond knows that. Otherwise he would never have challenged me to do it."

"But then—if you do nothing I mean—you will be discredited."

Again the glistening drops stood out on the medium's red forehead.

"Not among those whom I have helped, I hope," he said.

As he spoke his dark eyes rested upon Mrs Marden.

"You, Lady Terrerton, Mr Burnley and many others—you know what I am? You especially, Mrs Marden, I can appeal to in this painful moment, for you were very hard to convince. You thought me a charlatan at one time, didn't you?"

"I was doubtful for a long time."

"But you are doubtful no longer.

"No. But may I be perfectly candid?"

"Oh yes."

"Those things Larrington says he will reproduce——"

"Well—well?"

"I've never been convinced about them."

"What do you mean?"

"May they not be brought about by some peculiar physical power which might be imitated?"

"I don't know. All I know is that they happen. What makes them happen I could not tell you. My belief is that in my case they are produced by spirit agencies. But I couldn't prove it. And after all the greatest among us live by faith not by works. That is my comfort. The Mr Hammonds will always think faith to be folly, but that does not make it folly."

"No. But I hate your being discredited. I tried—I did my best to stop it."

"I know, I know. And for the sake of my son, now Captain, I could have wished——"

Suddenly his large face was contorted. It twitched for a moment painfully.

"I'm afraid in the regiment," he said, "that all this—the holding of his Father up to ridicule and contempt will—will——"

His deep and strong voice was overclouded with huskiness, and he could not continue.

"Dear Mr Orwyn!" Mrs Marden said.

Impulsively she laid her hand on one of his; it was hot and she felt it trembling.

"That's what troubles me too!" she said. "I told Mr Hammond how you loved your boy. I tried to make him see——"

"Never mind! Never mind! Harry is respected by everyone. He fights like a lion. He's afraid of nothing. All his comrades are loyal to him. Even if they laugh at his Father they won't dare to laugh at him."

He straightened up in his chair and threw his head back. It was evident to Mrs Marden that he was making a violent effort to reassure himself, to drive away fears which beset him.

"Don't you think perhaps for Harry's sake you ought to make some answer to Mr Hammond?" said Mrs Marden. "I'm sure all those who believe in you will come forward. I would for one. I would gladly write and acknowledge publicly what has convinced me. And so would others surely."

But Orwyn shook his head.

"I have thought it all carefully over," he said, "and I have resolved to let it alone. Any protest from me would only make things worse. I should be drawn into a controversy. And I'm no controversialist. But of course if any of

those whom I have helped towards consolation care to do anything I shall be deeply grateful. But I shan't ask them. I shan't ask anyone to stand up for me."

At this moment there was a tap at the door and the little maid came in and said,

"If you please, Sir, there's a gentleman from 'The News of the World' wants to see you very particular."

Again Orwyn's face was contorted by a spasm.

"I cannot see anyone. I have nothing to say," he exclaimed.

Mrs Marden got up and bade him good-bye quickly. When she reached the front door she came upon a very tall and rather impressive young man, who looked at her with sharp curiosity.

"Are you from the 'News of the World'?" she said.

"Yes," he said, taking off his hat.

"Mr Orwyn can't see you——"

"No, Sir," said the little maid from behind.

"But if you care to walk a little way with me I will gladly tell you something about Mr Orwyn which I think may interest you."

The young man looked keenly alert.

"That's just what we want," he said. "Our readers——"

And he strode away with Mrs Marden while the little maid stared after them with her cap on one side.

When he found that he could not draw Peter Orwyn into the open Hammond redoubled his attacks. He had wished to provoke a controversy and, though Orwyn was silent, he succeeded almost beyond his hopes. Orwyn's adherents, led by Mrs Marden—for the young man from "The News of the World" knew his business thoroughly—testified in print to the faith that was in them. Lady Terrerton, Arthur Burnley, and many others, wrote to the papers to tell of their experiences in Hornton Street. And the supporters of Hammond held them up to ridicule. The world became aware of the extraordinary number of adherents the believers in spiritualism had gained during the war. They were now quite evidently a compact body, numbering earnest people of all classes, who were ready to proclaim themselves members of something not unlike a new religion. Their strong energy and determination invigorated Hammond. He enlisted not only clergymen but several prominent doctors under his banner; the former to denounce the

modern falling away from the great truths of divinely revealed religion, the latter to proclaim the dangers to health which lay in wait for those who gave themselves to the pernicious excitement of séances.

Peter Orwyn became a sort of symbol. His name was on the lips of every sensation-lover. It became known in the trenches of France. Captain Orwyn wrote home to his Father about the " infernal dust-up ", as he described it, which was being made with the family name. His letter was warm-hearted and affectionate, but it was obvious that he was stung to the quick by the scandal of which his Dad was the centre. He told his Father in blunt soldiers' language that the war had set him more than ever against all the Tommy-rot indulged in by some of the people who stayed at home. " War," he wrote, " makes one think. It knocks all the nonsense out of one. Some chaps it turns to religion, others to just the reverse. But we out here admire the women who are doing things, working for the country, the nurses, the munition makers, the girls who are taking men's places in offices and banks to set them free to be soldiers, who are driving motors, working lifts, acting as 'bus conductors, scrubbing the floors of the wards, taking the tickets and carrying

the luggage at the stations, toiling in the canteens, or sweating on the land, not the idlers who sit in the dark listening to table rappings and spirit voices. Good Lord, Dad, what good does that do to the country? Do give it up, for Christ's sake! You know how I always hated it. But now I simply can't stand it. Suppose I was to stop a bullet, as I may any day, do you think a table in Hornton Street or anywhere else'd bring me back after I'd once gone West? If you'd seen as many die as I have you'd know different. I've lost two of my closest pals, the best that ever breathed, and I tell you they've gone—gone right away, and wherever they are they're not coming back to this dirty world of bloody business. God rest their souls, say I, and I wish they may be better off than we are."

Peter Orwyn's large hands shook when he read the letter and moisture came into his big dark eyes. Then he laid the letter down and sat still for a long time. He was a widower. He had lost his wife after the birth of their second boy. He was a man with a strong power and a strong need of affection; and although he was very fond of his younger son the elder was the real pride of his life. The day when Harry had become an officer had been a great

day for him, and Harry's promotion to a Captaincy had shaken him with something like exultation. And now—he had become almost a shame to his son. His heart burned within him.

It happened that the day on which Harry's letter arrived was the day selected by the conjurer, Larrington, for the first performance of his reproduction at St. Patrick's Hall of Peter Orwyn's spiritualistic manifestations. Orwyn knew this. Now he took up "The Daily Telegraph" and looked down its columns for Larrington's advertisement. He soon came to it and read his own name. In the paper was printed a challenge to him to come to the hall and see the performance. "Peter Orwyn is invited to be present and to reproduce, if he can, under test conditions Mr Larrington's tricks." At the top of the advertisement and also at the bottom the following words were printed in large letters, "Will he come?" Orwyn looked at them for a long time then, with an almost violent gesture, he tore the paper in half and flung it into the empty grate.

On that same day, though not at the same time, Mrs Marden also read Larrington's advertisement in the "Telegraph." In the morning she had received a short note from Cecil

Hammond containing an enclosure. The note invited her to come to St Patrick's Hall to see the " performance ". The enclosure was a ticket admitting two people to the stalls. On reading Hammond's note she had at once made up her mind not to go. But she had not thrown the ticket away. And now she held it in her hand and looked at it and then again at the advertisement.

Something was tempting her to go to St Patrick's Hall. Her advocacy of Peter Orwyn's *bona fides* had been warm and genuine. All the controversy about him had not shaken her faith in him in regard to herself and the voice which had spoken to her. But she had always wondered about the more material of his manifestations. Could he possibly be a trickster sometimes, at other times be a genuine and marvellous medium? If so, he had lied to her. She hated to think that. She could not really think it. And again she reverted to the conviction that certain phenomena were produced, in his case, by mysterious physical means which he did not comprehend. She wondered whether Larrington would really be able to reproduce accurately all these phenomena. She would like to ascertain that for herself. She hardly knew why. But she was very much tempted to go.

Presently Miss King came in to help her with her letters. When the short morning's work was finished Mrs Marden, almost in spite of herself, told Miss King about Hammond's invitation.

"Are you going?" said Miss King.

"I have a ticket for two. Shall we go?"

"But as you are absolutely convinced what would be the use?"

"Larrington cannot of course do all that Peter Orwyn does. I know that. Any tricks he may be able to perform would not shake my belief. It isn't that I am doubting. But—I suppose it is curiosity. I do feel inclined to go."

"I will come with you with pleasure if you wish it."

Mrs Marden hesitated.

"The only thing is that if I do go it might seem like a sort of treachery to Peter Orwyn," she said. "What do you think?"

"It seems to me that you have a perfect right to please yourself about it. But if I were you I shouldn't do anything that was against your own feeling."

"I scarcely understand why I want to go," Mrs Marden said doubtfully. "Of course you have never seen any of these material manifestations."

"No."

"Before you began coming to Hornton Street I had told Mr Orwyn how much I disliked them. I have never understood how they were produced—by him, I mean. But I can quite imagine that a real mystery might in some cases be imitated by a clever trickster—a levitation for instance."

"Yes, it might be so, I daresay."

"Shall we go?"

"I can see you want me to say yes."

"Perhaps I do," said Mrs Marden, with a faint smile.

"I don't think there can be any harm in going," said Miss King.

"Then we will go."

They went.

The rather sombre hall was crowded with an unusual audience. A great many of Hammond's adherents were there, but also a good many spiritualists. Then there were the lovers of sensation, journalists, two or three editors, several well known doctors, and various odd looking men peculiarly dressed, with flexible hands, expressive but hard faces, and swiftly moving eyes. These were conjurers and magicians of "the Halls". Some of them had overdressed and heavily painted women with them,

who smiled meretriciously without reason, and who had an air of shoddy celebrity. They were probably the ladies whose profession it is to be shut up in baskets and cabinets from which they mysteriously evaporate, to be levitated while apparently asleep, to be passed through hoops, and to be made the receptacles of vanished objects gathered from the public for conjurers' purposes. There were also a good many soldiers and several ladies in mourning.

Mrs Marden did not see Lady Terrerton or Arthur Burnley. Cecil Hammond was in a box with some friends.

After a few commonplace "turns" the curtain was lowered for a moment and Hammond and his friends left their box. Then after a pause Hammond appeared before the curtain and made a speech, in which he explained his reasons for attacking Peter Orwyn and mediums in general, and described how Larrington had convinced him that there was nothing but trickery in their "manifestations". He dwelt upon the wave of emotion—a tidal wave of grief and longing, he called it—which had inundated London because of the war, upon the nerve disturbance caused by the air raids, and upon the prevalence of hysteria, neurosis, acute neurasthenia, and kindred complaints, among

all classes of people. He quoted the statements of celebrated doctors in support of his contention that few of the dwellers in cities visited by aircraft were in a perfectly normal condition. He also gave the opinions of several clergymen on the mental state of their flocks. And he finished up by saying that in the soul and nerve misery of London the charlatans had found the greatest opportunity of their lives. They were war profiteers, making money out of disease, ruthless exploiters of the grief which should be sacred, and of the longings which cried to Heaven for consolation. They were harpies who fed upon the slain, those struck down in the soul by the hand of Fate. It was time that they were exposed, that their criminal cynicism was put an end to, that they were driven off from their prey—the gullible public. Mr Larrington, an honest man, who earned his living by skill, and who made no pretence that his skill was anything else, would show them that he could do all that, and even more than, Peter Orwyn and his fellow-tricksters one and all of them—could do.

At the end of his speech Hammond paused for a moment and looked about the hall.

"I see here several of Peter Orwyn's adherents," he said. "But I don't see Peter

Orwyn. We have invited him to come here, to come upon the stage and prove under test conditions that his feats are not accomplished by trickery. Is he here? Is Mr. Orwyn here? If so I invite him to come forward."

There was a long pause, during which many of the audience turned their heads and looked eagerly along the rows behind them.

"He is not here," said Hammond, in a sarcastic voice. "Well, I didn't expect him. It's no use waiting. So I will make way for Mr Larrington."

And he walked off the stage.

After a moment the curtain drew up, showing a stage hung with black. On it was a table spread with the musical instruments used by Peter Orwyn, a "cabinet", and a row of chairs. Fastened to the black draperies were several frames covered with glass. A bell was struck behind the scenes and then Larrington appeared. Mrs Marden had never seen him before, and she looked at him with a sort of hostile interest.

He was a very thin lanky man of about forty, with a long white face, a large pointed nose, an effeminate mouth with pale flexible lips turning down at the corners, meagre black hair streaked forward to cover a partially bald

head, and small shining black eyes which glanced swiftly, with keen self-possession over the audience. His hands had abnormally long and square tipped fingers. He was dressed in a braided morning coat and striped trousers, like Peter Orwyn. He looked horrid but very sharp, even clever, and he was obviously very sure of himself. Advancing to the footlights, with a rather mincing gait, in a thin, but penetrating voice, with common inflections, he addressed the audience.

Rapidly, and with sarcastic emphasis, he informed it of his first meeting with Mr Hammond, and of how he convinced that eminent gentleman that Orwyn and all his kind were merely conjurers, more or less skilful, masquerading as men—or women—possessed of supernormal powers. Over and over again, he said, through the ages people of this kind had been exposed, on the continent, here, and in America, but the credulity of the human race seemed to be limitless, and with each new generation new dupes were provided to fill the pockets of the unscrupulous imitators of the well known charlatans of the past. Even science itself sometimes fell an easy prey to these clumsy prevaricators, these awkward and half-fledged magicians, not one of whom would he, Lar-

rington, consider competent to appear on his stage even if they forsook their shibboleths and were anxious to earn an *honest* living.

"They know," he said piercingly, "that I can beat them all at their own dirty game and not one of them would dare to come near me!"

He added that he had not only issued the public challenge to Peter Orwyn, but that he had also written to him privately inviting him to come to the hall that day and give evidence of his powers as a medium, and promising that in the event of Orwyn's giving any convincing proof that he could cause spirits to return to this world he, Larrington, would publicly acknowledge that his attack on the medium's *bona fides* had been devoid of foundation, and would pay five hundred pounds to any war charity in which Orwyn was interested.

There was considerable applause at this point, and Larrington greeted it with a sickly, but self-satisfied smile. Then holding up his right hand he continued.

Orwyn had made no public reply to the challenge, no private reply to the letter. He had taken refuge in impenetrable silence. But nevertheless he might have decided on a dramatic appearance in their midst. He might

be even now in the hall. There was still time for him to take up the challenge.

"Is Mr Orwyn here?" exclaimed the conjurer, with the theatrical emphasis of the accomplished showman.

There was a dead silence.

"Is he here?" reiterated Larrington. "I call upon Peter Orwyn, the medium of 11 B Hornton Street, Kensington, to come up here, and in the presence of the committee of eminent men whom I have persuaded to assist me, to give us a proof that he can do anything which I cannot do equally well, or much better, by means of pure trickery."

Again there was a silence.

"Mr Orwyn has wisely remained secluded among his disciples in Hornton Street," said Larrington, raising a laugh in the audience. "I commend his prudence, and now, without further delay, I will proceed to show you that a poor earthbound conjurer, who is not admitted to any intercourse with other worlds than this, can be quite as ingenious as the modern Cagliostro."

Retreating a few steps, with a fixed smile on his clean-shaven face, he made a gesture towards the left side of the stage, and immediately the committee of eminent men filed into view and

took their seats on the chairs placed ready for them. Mr. Larrington named each one to the audience in turn, and after a few more words in explanation of what happened at the average séance in Hornton Street—or in any other retreat where a medium succeeded in gathering a few dupes around him—the lights were slightly lowered, the conjurer and the committee men assembled themselves round the large table in the centre of the stage and the séance began.

When it was over, and all Peter Orwyn's more striking manifestations had been faithfully reproduced in full sight of the audience, Larrington came forward once more.

"I hope you are satisfied," he said.

There was loud applause.

"I see—or rather I hear that you are. But Mr Hammond tells me that there are several of Peter Orwyn's adherents present among us to-day. Have any of them anything to say? Are any of them dissatisfied? Are they convinced that all Peter Orwyn can do I can do? I'm sure we should be very glad to hear their opinion."

There was a long pause.

Miss King looked at Mrs Marden, who was sitting quite still gazing at the conjurer. There was a stir in the audience. Several people

looked round. A small old man in the middle of the stalls had risen to his feet.

"Yes, Sir?" said Larrington, leaning forward with a smile. "What have you to say?"

"I am not convinced," said the little old man, in a quavering voice.

"No? And why is that, may I ask?"

"Mr Orwyn—Mr Orwyn——"

"Yes, Sir? I am listening. We are all listening to you."

"Mr Orwyn——" repeated the little old man.

He took out a red pocket handkerchief, passed it over his face, then put it to his eyes, and sat down, or rather sank down in his seat.

A murmur ran through the audience almost like a wind running through long grass. Several people stood up to look at the man who had not been convinced. But he said nothing more. He was obviously overcome by his feelings and was perhaps afraid now of his own temerity. Larrington waited for a moment. But nothing more happened, and at last he said,

"Gentlemen and ladies, I thank you for your kind attention. If no one else has anything to say I will not keep you any longer."

Again there was a pause. Then at a sign from the conjurer the curtain was lowered and the performance was at an end.

CHAPTER VIII

As they went slowly out in the crowd Mrs Marden said to Miss King,

"I want to speak to that poor little man who stood up. Can you see him?"

"No," said Miss King.

"Perhaps we shall come across him at the entrance. I want to find out whether he has had a similar experience to mine. I feel almost sure he has."

As the crowd began to split up and to flow out into the darkness of London taking various directions both Mrs Marden and Miss King looked for the little man. But they could not find him. Doubtless he had crept away carrying his poor little secret with him. Mrs Marden seemed disappointed at the failure of her search for him. As she drove to Hans Place with Miss King she scarcely said a word, and when they were together in the room where she did her business she was almost painfully preoccupied.

"I wish I hadn't gone!" she said at last, breaking away almost with violence from her strained reserve. "I wish I had never set

eyes on Larrington. I'm sure he is a horrible man. Compare his appearance with Mr Orwyn's. Who wouldn't trust the latter rather than the former?"

"I much prefer Mr Orwyn's face," said Miss King. "But why are you sorry you went?"

"Well, Larrington has proved to me what extraordinary things can be done by trickery. Of course I knew conjurers were very clever, but —it all might have happened in Hornton Street."

"But when it did happen there you disliked it. You told me so."

"Yes. I always hated that part."

"So it was not that sort of thing that convinced you."

"No. But don't you see——"

She stopped. She was looking straight before her, and her brows frowned above her dark eyes.

"We are all of us made up of good and bad," she said, in a low voice, as if following up aloud a train of thought. "Straight one minute, crooked the next, now truthful, now deceptive. We aren't all of a piece—are we?"

She looked at her friend.

"No, but I think many of us are more of a piece than that."

"Than what?"

"Well, I think a straight man or woman is straight right through more often than not."

"Do you? and a deceitful, a crooked man?"

"It would be very difficult to me to trust anyone ever who had once deliberately deceived me."

"I think you are too drastic, Emily. I don't think you allow enough for the temptations that assail people."

"Perhaps not."

After a pause Miss King said,

"Of course I know you are thinking about Mr Orwyn."

"Yes. I suppose after what you have seen to-day you think he is a fraud."

"But you forget—he has never produced most of those manifestations when I have been there."

"Well, I have seen them all," Mrs Marden said with a sort of profound dejection. "They must be tricks! They must be tricks! But if they are what is Peter Orwyn but a swindler and a liar?"

An almost desperate look came into her lined face.

"If the belief I came to in Hornton Street

were to be taken away from me I should be finished!" she said. "There would be nothing left to me, nothing. You see how I have altered even as it is. I'm almost an old woman. Any beauty I once had has gone. And even my figure—have you noticed how my figure has altered lately?"

"I've noticed that you've been getting very thin."

"Ah?"

"Will you do something if I ask you?"

"What is it?"

"Will you see a good doctor?"

"A doctor!" Mrs Marden said as if startled. "You don't think I'm ill, do you?"

"I don't think you look at all well."

"How can I be well when I suffer so much?" Mrs Marden said, almost angrily. "Besides, how can doctors minister to a mind diseased? There's nothing the matter with me except misery."

"But lately you have been so much happier. And yet in spite of that—I think you ought to see a doctor."

"But when I've nothing the matter with me!"

"Perhaps you need a cure."

"The only cure for me is to be certain one way or the other about Peter Orwyn."

"But you told me you knew it was your son's voice that has spoken to you. How could Mr Orwyn imitate your son if he never knew him?"

"I don't know. It seems impossible. But if I have deceived myself? If I am one of the fools? I have longed to believe. That's dangerous. I know it by my observation of other people. Nearly everyone I know well believes what he or she wants to believe. Men wouldn't believe this war was coming because they didn't want to. And so it is in the opposite way. We won't see what we don't want to see, and we will see what we wish for."

"But we all have to face the inevitable. There are things we can't escape from."

"The other afternoon I was alone in Peter Orwyn's room in the sunlight," said Mrs Marden.

"Yes?"

"I went and stood by the table and touched it. I thought 'If I were dead how could Peter Orwyn bring me back from the other world to speak to anyone who loved me?' The sun streamed in at the windows and—it seemed to me that such a thing couldn't be. I looked in the glass that day and noticed how thin I had grown. A sort of cold, almost icy, reality was

with me just then, I think. And it seemed to deny many things. Oh, how we poor creatures struggle! Life tears us to pieces. We are fighting in the sea for a plank to cling to. We don't want to drown. That's it! We don't want to drown."

"There's something that seems to me strange," said Miss King. "May I say what it is?"

"Yes, of course. You may say anything to me."

"You have believed in Peter Orwyn in spite of all those manifestations which never convinced you, why is it that you can't have any faith, any trust, in God?"

"God!"

"Yes."

"What do I know of God? I can't see God. I can't get at God. I can't even conceive what God is."

"But can't you feel God?"

"How?"

"In yourself?"

"I see injustice everywhere——"

"And what makes you know it is injustice and hate it?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I think it's God."

"But all the misery, the horrors of this war——"

"And all the nobility, the heroism, the selflessness, the self-sacrificing love of country, the readiness to give up everything for an idea, the idea of country. Where has it all come from?"

"I don't know."

"I'm sure it comes from God every bit of it. Every soldier boy who went of his own accord to fight out there was just told to go by God. That's what I think. And I think what they call 'going West' is just going to God."

Mrs Marden was silent.

"So I don't feel as if I really need Peter Orwyn to show me anything, or prove anything to me, though I'm interested, very much interested sometimes, in the sittings."

"Emily," Mrs Marden said very simply, "I wish I were like you."

Miss King blushed.

"I can't think why you wish that," she said.

"I'll tell you why. It's because you're so real. You're like a little bit of rock without any of rock's coldness."

Miss King blushed more deeply.

"How that man must have loved you!" added Mrs Marden. "But tell me—if you heard his voice, spoke to him, do you mean to

say that wouldn't make you more sure than you are now that he exists somewhere?"

"No, I don't think it would. In fact it wouldn't. Because when you are quite sure of something you can't become more sure of it."

"I shall never believe like that, never. It isn't in me. If it was what I have seen to-day couldn't have upset me as it has."

"What are you going to do? Are you not going to sit again?"

"I don't know what to do. I feel—I feel almost distracted to-day."

She went a little way off to a corner of the room where there was a mirror and stared at herself in it.

"I look horrible!" she said. "I must have lost pounds in the last few weeks."

"Do take my advice and see a medical man."

"Perhaps I will. But I must see Mr Orwyn first."

"Are you going to tell him about the performance?"

"I think I must. I suppose he will be very angry with me for having gone. But still—if only I were one of those who can shut their eyes and just believe! But perhaps he will make me believe. If only I could really test him!"

"But you have tested him in a way."

"Not really. There's only one test I could absolutely trust, that would make me know absolutely whether he is genuine or not genuine."

"What test is that?"

"It's rather horrible. You might almost hate me for thinking of it. I thought of it long ago."

"What is it? Can you tell me?"

"I wouldn't tell anyone else. If Captain Orwyn were to be killed I'm sure I should know whether Peter Orwyn believed the dead do return, or not."

"I hope he won't be killed," said Miss King soberly.

"Don't imagine I could ever wish such a thing."

"Of course I know you couldn't."

"It's only that then I should know. If he were a fraud he couldn't keep it up any longer then. He loves his son too much. And love is terribly sincere in the great moments."

When Miss King had gone Mrs Marden sat for a long while thinking about what she had said. Miss King had brought home to her the exact, as it were the inner, meaning of faith as somehow it had never been brought home to

her before. She seemed now to be looking at faith as one may look at some object of shining mystery, at a jewel with wonderful lights, wonderful depths in it, or at a fire with a still red heart glowing marvellously, and offshoots of leaping coloured flames. Faith was stranger than any jewel or fire. Whence did it come? Why did one possess it and another not?

That, too, was one of the mysteries, one that could not be touched by Larrington's long-fingered hands. She hated to think of Larrington. His attack upon Peter Orwyn had seemed to her horribly coarse and almost like an attack upon herself. Really it had been an attack upon herself. She felt bruised and weary, and full of acute apprehension. But she had had her disaster and surely nothing worse could fall upon her than that which had fallen already. She had managed to bear that blow without breaking under it; she could bear anything else. But she didn't want to suffer any more. She had had enough. She had surely paid in the last few months for all her years of happiness, those years which seemed lost far away in the mists of the old world before the war.

She was terribly restless that day and felt

driven to some feverish activity. Should she put on her hat, order a taxicab and go to see Peter Orwyn? She wanted to go and yet she was afraid to go. After much hesitation she told Hanson to get her a cab, and went upstairs to dress for going out. It was nearly seven o'clock. Hanson came to tell her the cab was at the door. She went out and got into it.

"Where shall I tell him to drive, Ma'am?" said Hanson.

"I think I'll go to——"

She was about to say Hornton Street, but she suddenly changed her mind.

"He can drive on—towards the Park. I'll tell him myself presently."

"Very well, Ma'am."

The order was given and she drove off.

When she was nearing Hyde Park Corner she leaned out and said to the man,

"Please go to St Martin's Church in Trafalgar Square."

"Right, Mum."

The man drove down Piccadilly.

When they reached the church, which is always open, Mrs Marden asked the man to wait, got out and ascended the steps. She had never been to the church since the day of the memorial service for Ronald. She went in and

sat down in a pew not far from the door. There were a few people scattered about, some sitting, some kneeling and praying. One was a tall young Colonial soldier with "Canada" on his shoulder. He was not far from Mrs Marden. She sat looking at him. Miss King's remarks about the soldiers were in her mind. Probably that young man was on leave. He might be going to the front, she supposed, any day. Perhaps he was starting almost immediately and had come to the church to prepare. He was sitting straight up, tall, rigid, his eyes turned towards the chancel. But presently he knelt down. She wondered if he was one of those who was fated to "go West" before the war was over. Then she wondered very much what was in his mind, whether he thought, as Miss King thought, that "going West" was just going to God. She supposed he was praying. Following his example she knelt down too, but she did not hide her face in her hands. She just knelt and looked at the distant altar. And she tried to "feel" God, she tried very hard and with an intense desire to succeed in her effort. For she was afraid and she longed to get rid of her haunting fear. If she lost the one belief she had—she had not lost it yet; but the events of the day had struck a hard blow

at it—and could not replace it by another she did not know what would happen to her. And Miss King's few words had made a tremendous impression upon her. It must be wonderful to be so sure of the further existence that no proof could make you more certain; it must be wonderful not to want any proof. "Seeing is believing"—yes. But not even to want to see, not even to want to hear—that makes the human being safe. If she were as Emily King she could bear to hear Peter Orwyn confess himself a trickster without even a tremor. Such a confession would make no difference to her.

If only she could "feel" God! How little Peter Orwyn and his truth or lies would matter to her then! She would not even want to test him if she were as Emily King was, as probably that young Canadian soldier in front of her was.

"Faith—give me faith!" her soul cried out almost desperately. "Why should I not have it when so many of the humblest, the poorest, the most afflicted have it, when even young soldiers in contact with the coarseness, the wickedness, the brutality, the hideous horrors of the world have it, and cannot lose it? If the foulness of war doesn't take it from them why

should I, who have been sheltered from all the attacking forces of evil, why should I not be able to have it? I *will* have it."

But faith did not come to her in the quiet church. She did not feel God; she only felt her own desperation. She cried out, and no voice answered her. Or, if any voice answered she was unable to hear it.

Presently the Canadian soldier rose from his knees, got up, took his cap and came out of his pew. As he drew near to Mrs Marden, who was still on her knees, he looked at her. He had large slate-coloured eyes with very long dark lashes. As they rested on hers she felt a strong impulse to speak to him. She got up quickly and followed him out of the church. Under the porch she came up with him.

"Are you going to France?" she said.

"Yes," he replied, speaking with a strong accent in a rather boyish voice. "We are off to-morrow morning."

She held out her hand.

"I wish you well," she said.

The young soldier took her hand without any diffidence. He did not seem at all surprised by her accosting him.

"Thank you," he said. "I hope we shall do all that's expected of us."

"I am sure you will. I have had a son fighting."

"Is he back now?"

"No—he's—he's gone West."

The soldier looked hard at her. There was a very kind expression just then in his eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But I expect he's better off than some of us are. Not that I want to go just yet. But it's all in the day's work, and if my time comes, well, I shall find myself with some of the best over there."

He made a curious gesture. To Mrs Marden it seemed half indifferent, half romantic.

"Good-bye," she said. "I shall think of you when you've gone."

"That's good!" he returned.

He saluted her and went down the steps.

When he had disappeared in the throng of people and vehicles which is generally passing near the entrance to Charing Cross and the Strand Mrs Marden paid off the chauffeur of the taxicab and walked all the way to Hans Place. She went through the Admiralty Arch, along the Mall, skirted Buckingham Palace and passed by Victoria Station. The news boards were out near the Grosvenor Hotel. On one she saw in huge letters,

THE EVENING NEWS. LATE EDITION
Exposure of a Famous Medium

She did not buy the paper. On another board she saw,

Larrington's Attack
on
Peter Orwyn, the Medium.

At that moment she hated the world and felt utterly disgusted with life.

For several days there was a good deal in the papers about Larrington's performance and conjuring versus spiritualism. Then the matter died down, and some fresh sensation took its place. A little girl was abducted, or a returned soldier murdered his faithless wife with a hammer—or something happened which had fascination for the public. And—there was always the war for those who considered that more important than the follies and crimes of their neighbours. During those days Mrs Marden's life seemed to her to be as it were in abeyance. She lived in a lull; she moved in a still, brooding, and yet curiously dead atmosphere; she did very little. She seemed to be waiting, to be obliged to wait, to be imprisoned in a pause.

Now and then she looked in the glass. And each time she did so she thought her body was thinner. Her face, too, was certainly getting very thin; it was becoming almost sharp in its outline.

"I shall look like a witch presently if this goes on," she said to herself.

But she did not go to a doctor. It seemed that the prison of the pause prevented her from doing anything so definite as that.

But at last—she did not know why—the embargo was silently removed. She woke up one morning and felt a renewed sense of activity; more than that she felt that the time had arrived when she had to do a very definite, very important thing. When she was dressed and had breakfasted she knew what it was; she had to see Peter Orwyn again that day.

About eleven o'clock she telephoned to Hornton Street. Orwyn himself answered her. She knew his deep voice at once.

"Can I come to see you to-day?" she asked. "It's Mrs Marden."

"To see me? Do you mean for a sitting?" said the deep voice.

She had not meant to ask for a sitting, but now she hesitated. Before she spoke Orwyn said,

"I feel unequal to a sitting to-day."

"I hope you are not ill?"

"No. But I couldn't possibly sit to-day. There would be no power."

Mrs Marden now thought there was something strange in the sound of the voice.

"Nothing has happened, I hope?" she said.

"No."

"Then might I come this afternoon to pay you a short visit?"

"Certainly if you wish it."

"Thank you. I will come about five. Will that do?"

"Yes."

"Good-bye till then."

"Good-bye, Mrs Marden."

She put the receiver up.

"I wonder what is the matter with Peter Orwyn?" she thought.

The telephone seemed to have conveyed to her not merely his voice but something else, something of his mind, of perturbation, of heavy anxiety, something troubled.

"What can be the matter?" she thought.

She had not seen Orwyn since Larrington's exposure and attack. Perhaps they had produced a profound effect upon Orwyn. She wondered.

Just after five she entered his house.

"How is Mr Orwyn?" she asked the little maid who opened the door.

"Pretty much as usual, Mum, I think," said the girl. "'E seems rather down to-day though. But 'e's 'ad a deal to go through ain't 'e?"

"Yes, I know."

"These is hodd times for heverybody, Mum."

"Yes indeed."

Her cap was still on one side. Mrs Marden wondered whether that fact implied a coquettish tendency in the girl, or merely carelessness persistently taking one form.

"Mr Horwyn's waiting for you, Mum."

The medium met them at the door of the drawing-room. Mrs Marden at once noticed a change in him. The steady earnest look had gone out of his eyes and was replaced by a brooding anxiety which suggested a harassed mind. He was fidgety and made unusual gestures. His large hands were continually in movement. Even his voice seemed changed, less firm, less resonant than it generally was.

"I hope you're not ill?" she said to him.

"Oh no. Why should I be ill? I'm never ill."

"I'm afraid all this horrid fuss in the papers has worried you."

"Oh no, not at all. We who have unusual faculties and powers must expect to be misunderstood by ordinary people. A blind man is always more popular than a man who can see further than others do. I'm not at all disturbed, not at all. Since all these attacks upon me more people have sought me out than ever before. After Larrington's so-called exposure of me I had many telegrams expressing belief in me. They're coming in still. I had two this morning. That's a great consolation."

"It must be," she said uncomfortably.

There was something in Orwyn's look and manner that day which made her feel ill at ease.

Moved to abruptness by her discomfort she said,

"I went to see Larrington's performance."

Peter Orwyn started, and made an odd fluttering movement with his hands.

"Indeed!" he said.

"Yes. I felt I must go."

"Why not? You had a perfect right to go."

"Mr Orwyn—I don't want to hurt you, but do please be perfectly frank with me."

"Frank! What about? Why shouldn't I be frank?"

"Mr Larrington of course couldn't do—didn't

even attempt to do—all you can, all you have done in my presence."

Orwyn threw back his head and straightened his body.

"Of course he couldn't. You needn't tell me that, Mrs Marden."

"What he did was to reproduce—exactly—all the manifestations I told you once I didn't care about."

"Exactly. Just so! Just so!"

"Are those manifestations tricks?"

"Mr Larrington is only a conjurer. He doesn't pretend to be anything else that I'm aware of. Of course all he does is trickery, clever trickery."

"No—but when you do them?"

"Eh?"

Orwyn stared hard at her with a dull look, as if he didn't understand what she meant.

Almost desperately she continued,

"Please don't be angry! I feel I must thoroughly understand. It all means so much to me now. Are not certain things you do —the things Larrington can imitate—tricks, and are not the other manifestations what you say they are? I want you to tell me. I think we all—I mean most of us are a mixture of sincerity and insincerity. I daresay I am.

Perhaps the way you get power is by throwing those who sit with you into a state of conviction, and perhaps you can only get them into that state by preparing the way by certain startling manifestations. You may think that justifies you in—in—I could understand if it were so."

"Really, Mrs Marden! are you accusing me——?"

"No, no. I'm asking you, begging you to be frank with me."

She paused. Orwyn was silent.

"Why did you refuse to sit to-day?" she suddenly asked.

"I'm not very—I felt I couldn't."

"Why was that?"

He got up from his chair.

"I'm very sensitive to influences," he said. "There are bad influences about to-day."

"Bad influences!"

"Hostile to me. For hours I have felt them. I've been up all night. I'm passing through a black patch."

She stared at him. The peculiar sensation she had felt when he spoke to her through the telephone was with her again, but now deepened. It came to her from him; it flowed into her out of him. At that moment she

knew that there was something abnormal in this man, that he was not as most other men were. Before she could say anything there was a knock at the door.

Orwyn turned towards it, looked at the door, but said nothing.

There was another knock.

Still he said nothing.

"I'll open it," said Mrs Marden.

Orwyn looked at her and nodded. She went to the door and opened it. The little maid was outside.

"There's a telegram for Mr Orwyn, Mum," she said.

"Please give it to me."

The maid gave Mrs Marden the telegram and went downstairs.

"It's for you," said Mrs Marden, going to the medium.

Orwyn did not hold out his hand for the telegram.

"I know," he said hoarsely. "I know what is in it."

"But—it's probably another of those——"

"No, it isn't," he said, in a loud angry voice.

"Would you like me to open it?"

Without making any reply he turned and

walked to the window in the back wall of the room behind the round table.

Mrs Marden stood for a moment holding the telegram. Then almost mechanically she opened it and read it.

It was from the War Office and announced the death of Captain Orwyn in action.

CHAPTER IX

As Mrs Marden looked at the telegram she realised that Fate had given Peter Orwyn and his sincerity or insincerity into her hands. It was within her power now to apply the test of which she had thought so often. And, thinking this, she looked up from the telegram. Orwyn was standing close to the window. One of his large hands grasped the window ledge firmly. The skin about his knuckles was stretched, and whiter than the skin of the rest of his hand. His bulky form was held upright, but his head was bent. As Mrs Marden looked at him she remembered the telegram she had received, which had stopped her midway in her chatter about the Alhambra matinée, which had changed all life for her in a moment. Perhaps feeling her eyes upon him Orwyn half turned towards her and his eyes met hers.

"It's bad news," she said.

"I know," said Orwyn, still staring at her and keeping hold of the window ledge. "I've felt it coming. That's why I couldn't go to bed last night. What does it say?"

Mrs Marden opened her lips to read out

the telegram, but the remembrance of the similar message to her a few months ago again surged into her mind. It was almost as if Time had rolled back and she was once more receiving her blow. All over England no doubt such telegrams were being handed into the homes boys had left for ever; all over England people who loved were tearing open the sinister envelopes and reading the end of their hopes and fears. For an instant she was overwhelmed by the horror of war and no words came to her lips.

"It's about my son, isn't it?" said Orwyn.

"Yes," she said, with difficulty.

"Is he wounded?"

"No."

"Is he dead?"

"Yes."

"Ah!——Was he killed in action?"

"Yes."

"When was he killed?"

"It doesn't say."

She went nearer to Orwyn holding out the telegram. But Orwyn moved away.

"No—I don't want it," he said.

"I'm sorry—terribly sorry."

She put the telegram down on the table at which she had so often sat with the medium.

She did this mechanically, without thinking what she was doing, but when her fingers touched the wood she remembered, and she looked at Orwyn sharply with a piercing scrutiny.

"I said just now I was terribly sorry for you," she said abruptly, driven to speak in spite of herself, driven by the feeling of the wood beneath her finger tips. "But why should I be? Your boy was a splendid fellow. But you haven't lost him, have you? You can bring him back."

Unconsciously she tapped the wood, tapped it loudly several times, turning her fingers inwards so that they struck it with the nails.

"Here—here—you can force him to come. You have brought other boys back here, Lady Terrerton's son, and my Ronald. So you can bring your own boy. Isn't that very wonderful? Aren't you thankful to God to-day for the power he has put into you? Doesn't it draw out the sting of Death? Just this piece of wood—and you, with two or three others to create power, or to help you in developing power, and the gulf is bridged! What you have done for others you will be able to do for yourself now. What you have done for *me* you can do for yourself. You have helped me. Let me help you. Promise me that when

you summon your own son I shall be sitting beside you."

While she spoke Orwyn gazed at her without moving his body. But his face moved. His mouth twitched violently.

Then Orwyn came away from the window. He came slowly up to the table, and stood there opposite to Mrs Marden, who was still, though she did not know it, tapping on the wood.

"Don't do that," he said.

She frowned, but she did not stop.

"Don't—don't I tell you!"

"Why not? Why shouldn't I?"

"It's a lie."

"What is?"

"I can't bring him back."

There was the sound of impotent despair in his voice.

"Why not? My boy came."

"No."

"But he did! He spoke to me. I heard his voice. He spoke of things only he and I knew."

"I tell you I can't bring them back," Orwyn said, almost savagely. "They're gone. No one can call them back. Harry's gone, I tell you, gone where no one can reach him."

Again his mouth twitched, and he threw up his head with a convulsive movement that was full of violence.

"But you told me——"

"And I tell you now it's a lie. He knew. Harry knew—he wrote—only the other day. When they've gone West it's all over—they can never come back."

Both his hands swept out, and he began to sob loudly, though there were no tears in his eyes.

"Oh go away! Leave me!" he muttered.

Again he lifted his hands almost threateningly. Mrs Marden turned and went out of the room, followed by the sound of those ugly, terrible sobs.

She stumbled down the narrow stairs, struggled blindly with the door handle and at last opened the door. The sunlight streamed in upon her from the warm, quiet street. A nurse girl, wheeling a baby in a perambulator, went by just as she came out upon the pavement. She saw the baby's large light eyes regarding her with a shallow look of infantile observation. The nurse girl glanced at her, gave the perambulator a jerk and hurried on. In the distance she heard the sound of a child beginning to cry. She had left

Orwyn's door wide open, but she did not know it. Not till she got into Kensington High Street did she recover herself sufficiently to take any thought for her appearance, her manner, the way she was walking.

She felt at this moment no more pity for Peter Orwyn. She was incapable of pity for anyone. Wherever she looked she seemed to see Cecil Hammond's energetic and satirical face, and she seemed to hear his voice saying, "Burnley wouldn't believe . . . but you would!"

After walking a few steps along the High Street she turned back and got into an omnibus at the corner near the Church. A small boy sat next to her. Two old women were opposite. The boy was sucking something, a bullseye perhaps. He looked radiantly cheerful and pleasantly gluttonous. The old women were talking to each other in worn-out voices about bargains. One of them had bought some "remnants" at Barker's and was consulting the other about how it would be best to use them. Mrs Marden heard her say,

"Cherry colour suits me better than green. You remember that bonnet——"

The other remembered.

At Hyde Park Corner the omnibus stopped and Mrs. Marden got out. The small boy was sucking another bullseye and looked at her with an expression which suggested a wink.

She walked into the Park and sat down on a green chair. The sun was less strong now. Evening was approaching. She thought of the Canadian soldier, of the melancholy clergyman, then of Miss King. And suddenly she resolved to go to Miss King's rooms. She had never yet seen them, but she knew where they were, in a small street not far from the British Museum in Bloomsbury. She got up, walked across the Park to the Marble Arch and succeeded in finding a taxicab.

When she reached Miss King's number she rang the bell.

An elderly woman opened the door and said that Miss King had just come in.

"Please ask if she will see Mrs Marden."

In a moment Miss King came to the door, looking rather earnestly surprised.

"May I come in?" said Mrs Marden.

"Of course—do! I'll get you some tea."

"No, I don't want anything."

"But I'm just going to have tea myself. I'm on the third floor I'm afraid."

"I don't mind stairs," said Mrs Marden.

But she ascended them slowly, surprised at her own feebleness. Evidently the shock she had received in Hornton Street had weakened her body for the moment. Or—had she often felt rather tired of late? She asked herself that vaguely as she went up.

"This is my little room," said Miss King, opening a door painted dark green.

"How nice and simple it is!" said Mrs Marden. "And what a quantity of books!"

"When I have time I go a good deal to the second-hand bookshops. You look tired."

"I am very tired."

"Sit here and I'll make the tea."

She drew forward a basket chair with a chintz covered cushion.

"I won't be a minute."

She went away through some folding doors.

"So Emily and her belief live here!" thought Mrs Marden. "How wonderfully clean and neat it is. But of course Emily's room would be."

The sight of the many books touched her. She knew that Miss King was poor. Very soon her friend came back with tea and biscuits on a Japanese tray. She set it down on a round table of wicker work.

"You'll soon feel refreshed," she said, giving Mrs Marden a cup.

"I'm afraid not but I am glad to have it."

After quite a long silence she said,

"Of course you can see something has happened."

"Yes."

"It's this—Captain Orwyn has been killed in the war."

"Oh—poor, poor Mr Orwyn!" said Miss King, with an accent of deep, almost tender pity.

"I—it's awful, but I don't feel any sorrow for him just now. I was with him when the telegram came. I read it and told him the news. He made me. He was expecting it."

"Why?"

"I don't know. But I suppose he isn't like most people."

"You mean he had a premonition?"

"I suppose he had."

"That often happens I believe."

"It didn't to me. After I had told Mr Orwyn I said to him that now he would be able to call his son back as he called mine. And then he said—he said——"

She closed her eyes, opened them and went on,

"That he couldn't do that because those who had gone West never returned."

"He told you that!"

"Yes. He said it—spiritualism was all lies, nothing but lies. And then he asked me—told me to leave him. He began sobbing, not crying. I couldn't stay. I took an omnibus. Then I sat in the Park, and then I thought I would come here. You see Mr Hammond and Larrington were right."

"My dear!" said Miss King, putting out her hand. "My dear!"

"It is rather terrible to have been such a fool. And even now I can't quite understand. But I couldn't ask—he was sobbing."

"Poor man!"

"And am not I poor now?"

"It's all horrible, both for you and for him. If only I could get you to see——"

"You can't. I am not made that way. I am one of the foolish women who litter the world."

"No, indeed!"

"Yes, I am. We are no use to anyone, except to those who make money out of our folly. It would be better if there were none of

us left. We ought to be put in the front line—like the Belgian women—to serve as shields to the fighting men."

"Don't dear!"

"Emily, I wish I could die to-day. I am sick of myself. If I had done anything! But my work began and ended with buying hats and selling programmes."

"Why not begin to do something now?"

"What could I do? What can a fool do? Besides I feel so tired and played out."

"That will pass. You have had a shock."

"Yes. Will you come with me to Hans Place?"

"Of course I will."

"I'm afraid to be alone to-night. It has made me feel almost ill."

"I am going to take you to a doctor to-morrow," said Miss King, with sudden decision.

"I wish he would tell me I was going to die."

"Hush! Shall I put on my things now, or would you rather rest here first?"

"Let's go, or I mayn't be able to go at all. I feel like a thing made of water."

Miss King dressed, packed a handbag, got

a taxi, and took Mrs Marden back to Hans Place.

When they were there Mrs Marden seemed so tired and weak that Miss King insisted on her going to bed. Mrs Marden gave in to her after a poor little protest. When she was in bed with her friend sitting by her she said,

"This is almost like a repetition of the day when my telegram came. I locked myself in then. I went to bed and lay awake all night trying to think things out. But that's no good. It would be better for some of us if we couldn't think at all. But even then life was worth more to me than it is now."

"Why was that, dear?"

"I had no belief then, but I had never had one. Now I have believed and been betrayed."

She sat up on her pillows, stretching out her thin arms along the coverlet.

"Oh, Emily, how can Peter Orwyn look as he does and be as he is? How can any man set himself to the tricking of poor women and men who are yearning for consolation?"

"I don't know. But people are so strange. Perhaps he thinks it is better to console with lies than not at all."

"But the money! And even now I can't

understand. I think he really has some strange powers which most of us haven't got. I have felt them. I even felt them to-day."

"I think that too."

"Perhaps——"

For a moment her eyes shone and she seemed about to utter a torrent of eager words. But the impulse must have died, for she fell back on the pillows, and only said,

"No—no."

Then, after a pause, she added,

"An end comes to the folly of even the greatest fool. He has told me himself what he is."

Later that night, after they had had some food together in Mrs Marden's bedroom, Miss King tried earnestly to comfort her friend. She was wonderfully frank and uncovered the secrets of her own heart. She even offered up her love for the man she had lost as a sacrifice on the altar of friendship—by telling it, showing what it had been what it still was in her life. The love of a typist for a young dentist—yes, and the love of a girl who was true as steel for a man who must have been worthy of it. Mrs Marden walked that night on the bedrock of reality, and the firmness of it seemed very wonderful beneath her feet.

And then, passing on from things temporal to things eternal, very simply, very naturally and without any self-consciousness, Emily King tried to tell of her soul experience. That was much more difficult. For every woman on earth can reveal the meaning of love to her somehow, if she really wishes to, but not every woman can tell truly and clearly the mysterious processes of the spirit in connection not with a man but with God. And Emily King was not a great mistress of language. Nor had she a powerful intellect. But she tried her best, moved by an intense desire to bring comfort to a stricken human creature, by a supreme longing to replace Mrs Marden's destroyed belief in the Hornton Street medium with another belief which she held closely as her greatest treasure—the belief in an overruling love which regards each individual on the swarming earth, which sees the light at the end of the darkest path, which knows the value of tears, which allows everything that happens for some mighty reason, which does not explain yet, as an astronomer does not explain to an infant the movements of the stars because the receptacle is too small to contain the contents of his knowledge.

She failed in her attempt, and she felt that

great impotence which has been felt by many of the saints and the mystics. Her vision could not be seen by the eyes of her friend, and she said to herself, "It's my fault." And there she was wrong. It was no fault of hers. At last she desisted. She, too, felt very tired and now almost confused. Her mind seemed all tangled up.

"I'm very stupid at explaining what I feel," she said.

"No, Emily, it isn't that. But there are things we can't hand on to anyone, and I think they are the most valuable things."

"Do you think all I cling to is an illusion?" asked Miss King.

"I don't know. But thousands of people have died happily on the breast of illusion. I'm certain of that."

And then Miss King said a thing that sounded to herself hard as she said it.

"My dear, I may be wrong but it seems to me there is something in you which almost fights to be unhappy."

"Then it's my nature and I can't help it."

"Perhaps not. Have you ever heard of a poem called 'The Hound of Heaven'?"

"Yes, of course. But I have never read it. Why do you ask?"

But Miss King did not say. What she did say was,

"I think one of the most awful things in life is that we can do so little for other people."

Next morning Mrs Marden looked terribly ill, Miss King thought, and she declared her decision to make her friend see a doctor at once. But Mrs Marden refused. Since the events of the previous day her native obstinacy seemed to have grown stronger, to have taken on something of almost hard defiance. Her misery had progressed to an almost brutal stage, and she did not trouble to—perhaps she could not—conceal that from her friend.

"I am perfectly well in body," she said. "I am certain I shall live to be a very old woman. You must go off to your work, Emily. Don't bother about me any more. I don't know why I have afflicted you with all my absurd misery. Ronald always hated what he called 'pulling women'. I've done with all that. As I've got to go on I shall find something to do. Then at last I may get hold of some self-respect."

"Just now you're not fit to do anything."

"I will very soon prove to you that you're wrong, Emily."

CHAPTER X

Mrs Marden immediately began to look about for some war work to do. She wished it to be hard, even disagreeable, for something in her desired morbidly an increase of misery. As she had now nothing of happiness to look for, as every door to happiness was shut and barred against her, she was resolved to try and lose herself in its opposite, to drink the last drop of the cup of sorrow. She was full of the defiance of the doomed. The whole expression of her face had hardened. Even her manner had become cold and obdurate. Bitterness enveloped her like a garment.

She sought work and she found it in a hospital for wounded soldiers established in the West End by some women she knew. Nursing of course she was unfitted for. She knew nothing about it. And she said so frankly. But there are other things to be done in a hospital, things that almost anyone can do, but that most people want not to do. She was set to wash up plates, dishes, cups and saucers, to clean knives and forks, to carry up trays

She even swept floors, dusted, and scrubbed. It was a new experience. She found it a hard and monotonous one, but she persevered. Sometimes, while she was doing these menial duties, she thought of her dead boy. He had praised her for selling programmes. What would he have said to her now if he had been still alive? He might, perhaps, have been almost shocked to see his formerly gay, and once beautiful, Mother immersed in the activities of a servant. On the other hand he might have admired her for unselfishness. She wondered dully which it would have been. Anyhow it didn't matter. For now nothing mattered. She toiled on. In the mornings she was up early. In the evenings she returned home late, tired out, even sometimes exhausted. Then she generally went straight to bed. But, as she did not sleep very well, she read a good deal at night. Remembering Miss King's question she studied "The Hound of Heaven". Her literary sense made her know it was beautiful in its mystic elaboration; but she dismissed it as the outpouring of a poet not in touch with the realities of life. Then she read philosophy. (Novels no longer interested her.) She tried Herbert Spencer and was bored. Then she read "The Martyrdom of

Man" by Reade. This interested her, and much of it chimed in with her mood of bitterness. Even the title of the book had a vague fascination for her. For are not all men and women the martyrs of life, she thought? Finally she got hold of Haeckel's "The Riddle of the Universe". This fascinated her by its definiteness, its outspoken contempt for the follies of men. She read the chapter on the immortality of the soul again and again with a sort of bitter relish. Here at least there was no folly. Haeckel did not lie drowsing on the breast of illusion. He confuted many assertions that are freely and loudly made by the determined believers in immortality, among them one made by Emily King long ago when she and Mrs Marden had first talked rather intimately together. Miss King had said that the whole human race had implanted in it an instinct that there is another life beyond this life. From Haeckel Mrs Marden learnt that the dogma of a personal immortality is not an original idea of the human mind, and that many of the earliest races of men had no belief in either immortality or in a God. Such a belief, therefore had not been implanted in man but had been gradually acquired by man. She did not tell Miss

King of her discovery. Even in her bitterness she had no desire to harm the happiness of her friend. But she was confirmed by Haeckel in her conviction that men believed they must have eventually what they longed to have, merely because they longed to have it. And hence, no doubt, the general belief in immortality and in reunion with lost loved ones.

But though she accepted with bitter eagerness so much of Haeckel's teaching, especially his "necessity of emotion" doctrine, she revolted against his apparently quite genuine dislike of the idea of personal immortality combined with reunion with loved ones released from the shackles of the flesh. His joy in the idea of eternal sleep after a life vigorously and thoroughly lived she could not share. And his dissection of the difficulties of after relationships in another world, with its touches of sardonic humour, seemed to sear her heart like a red hot iron. She knew that she had a horror of eternal sleep, of ceasing to be; she knew that she still, in her complete hopelessness, longed almost desperately to be reunited with Ronald. Could Haeckel have ever really loved anyone? She couldn't believe it. If he had he could surely never have written certain pages.

It was torture to long without hope. Yet she would not have lost her longing even if she could. She felt that she would be less without it, a monster instead of a woman, a mother.

One evening, quite unexpectedly, Arthur Burnley called on her. She had not seen him nor heard from him since Larrington's exposure of Orwyn. And when he was shown in she was conscious of a slight stir of interest such as she had not felt for a long time.

Burnley looked surprised when he saw her. His penetrating eyes rested on her face with an intense scrutiny for a moment.

Then he said,

"I'm sorry. I did not know you were ill."

"But I'm not ill," she said.

"You—I'm glad to hear that."

There was no conviction in his voice, and he still looked at her with a sort of pitiful intensity.

"I'm only tired. I'm always very tired at night because of my work. I'm really working now at a hospital, scrubbing, cleaning up—all that sort of thing."

"Well, don't do too much," he said.

She was wondering about Burnley and Peter Orwyn, wondering whether Burnley

knew what she knew. Since the day of Orwyn's confession to her she had heard nothing about him.

"Isn't it tragic about Captain Orwyn?" said Burnley. "I wanted to ask you whether you have heard anything of our poor friend Peter."

"No, nothing."

"You know he's left London?"

"No, I didn't know that."

"That abominable, that scandalous attack engineered by Hammond, followed by the death of his son, must have broken him up, I suppose. Anyhow he's gone. I can't get his address. He doesn't answer my letters. Have you written to him?"

"No."

Burnley looked surprised.

"I saw him after his son's death," said Mrs Marden.

"Really! How did the poor fellow take it?"

"I was with him when the telegram from the War Office came."

Burnley looked keenly interested.

"I read it and told him the news."

Burnley kept his fiercely bright eyes fixed upon her but said nothing.

"He had been expecting it, I think. He had had a premonition of evil."

"Ah! He knew! He would have known. Orwyn would certainly have known. A wonderful psychic such as he is."

"Mr Orwyn may be what is called psychic," said Mrs Marden, in a hard cold voice. "But he is an impostor."

Burnley suddenly reddened.

"Mrs Marden! Surely the contemptible trickery of Larrington hasn't taken you in?"

"It isn't that!"

"Do you mean then that Cecil Hammond's abominable materialistic articles——"

But she interrupted him.

"Mr Orwyn told me himself that the whole thing—spiritualism—was nothing but imposture—lies, all lies."

"Orwyn told you! Forgive me—please. But really I cannot believe it."

"He told me he couldn't summon the dead."

"Summon is perhaps hardly the word. But——"

"I said to him that he must be thankful for his own power, because now he would be able to hold communication with his dead son. Then he told me the truth, that he was impotent, a

sham, a deceiver. He told me that those who are dead can never come back—never."

She spoke with hard, with pitiless decision.

"So you see you and I have been fools!" she added.

Burnley looked very angry. He moved his lips as if about to say something, then closed them and frowned. She could see that he was making a strong effort to contain his indignation. He got up, went to a table and fingered some books which were lying there. One of them was Haeckel's "Riddle of the Universe". He looked at it, turned a page or two, then took it up and, apparently, read a few words.

"So you've been reading Haeckel?" he said.

"Yes."

"Do you like it?"

"Yes. It's deeply interesting and wonderfully reasonable, I think."

"Reasonable!" he said. "Well, I think it's pernicious."

He shut the book and put it down.

"I'm very sorry for you," he said.

"Why?"

"Because I think—I know you are easily deceived."

"I have been certainly, by Mr. Orwyn. But I don't think I shall ever be deceived again."

"I *know* Peter Orwyn is not an impostor."

"He says himself that he is."

"You must have mistaken him. It is not fair, it is *not* reasonable to judge a man when he is stricken, when he is reeling under a blow. He is not himself in such a moment."

"I beg your pardon. Such moments bring out a man's real self in my opinion."

"Oh no! People say the wildest things in sorrow, in rage. They are untrue to themselves. It's in calm that we are our real selves, when we are in possession of all our faculties."

"I don't think so."

"Then we disagree. I am certain that poor Orwyn was in such distress at the sudden loss of his son that he disbelieved in, denied his own powers. Probably at that moment he genuinely felt that what he had done for others he might be powerless to do for himself. And so he condemned himself, said far more than was true. I think that is the most natural thing in the world. It would take much more than that to shake my faith in him."

"Do you know what Cecil Hammond once said to me about you?"

"Hammond! no! What did he say? How could I know?"

"Of course you couldn't. It was foolish of me——"

"Tell me, please."

She hesitated, but the cruelty in her made her go on.

"He said to me once that if Orwyn were to confess himself a trickster you wouldn't believe it."

Burnley reddened again, and his curious eyes seemed for a moment to dart fire at her.

"I—I have the greatest contempt for Hammond," he said, in a low angry voice. "A man who is in the hands of a common conjurer! I am sorry you can be influenced by such a materialistic fellow."

"I am not influenced. But I am influenced by truth, by facts."

"Oh, Mrs Marden, believe me you don't know what truth is!"

"Which of us does, I wonder?"

He stood still for a moment more by the table. Then he said, in a forced voice,

"Well, I must be going. I hoped—I am very sorry about this. Please forgive me if I have shown any anger, if I have been discourteous. I feel very deeply about some things.

I—I once lost by death a girl I was very fond of. Peter Orwyn has helped me more than I can say. He has helped me to face life with hope. That is the explanation of anything that may seem strange to you in me. I shall try to seek him out. And I am quite sure I shall find I was right about him. If I do——"

But she interrupted him.

"I know Mr Orwyn now," she said. "I pity him, but nothing would ever make me believe in him again."

They said good-bye to each other like strangers.

"Poor Mr Burnley!" thought Mrs Marden, when he had gone, with a sort of acid pity.

And then, mentally, she dismissed him out of her life.

For a few days more she continued to work at the hospital, but one evening, on returning from it, she felt so thoroughly exhausted that she lay down at once on the sofa in her sitting-room, shut her eyes and remained quite passive. Just then she seemed to have come to the end of her physical powers. She thought of the morrow when again she would be due at the hospital, and she knew that she would be unable to go there. She would not have

the strength to do even the smallest thing. She could not even wash glasses. Just lately she had noticed a certain symptom which was not normal, which proved to her that there was something physically wrong with her. As she was afraid of idleness, which meant in her case a greater loneliness, she decided that she would see a doctor, and on the following morning she telephoned to say she could not go to the hospital and sent for a general practitioner whom she knew.

He came, asked her a good many questions, made an examination, and then said,

"I think the best thing you can do is to go to Doctor Layton of Harley Street."

"But surely you can prescribe for me. I am quite ready to follow your advice."

"I don't feel quite sure about your case. I should like to hear another opinion."

"But who is Doctor Layton? I've never heard of him."

The doctor raised his eyebrows.

"That shows how narrow the fame of some of our most brilliant men is. Layton is a great man."

"Is he a specialist?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Oh—well, I think he is the best man for you. Now do take my advice and consult him. Let me make an appointment for you. I am sure he will be able to clear up any doubts about your condition."

"But I am not in pain. I have only been losing weight, and——"

"Exactly! We must try to stop you from that. Well now I'll make an appointment and let you know. Meanwhile keep perfectly quiet. Don't do anything at all. I'll telephone to you sometime to-day."

He got up, smiling.

"Layton's a splendid man. You will like him."

"I don't want to see him."

"You really must see him," said the doctor, with quiet authority.

Mrs Marden said nothing more. She felt too tired to resist his will.

Later in the day he telephoned to say he had made an appointment for her with Doctor Layton at one o'clock on the following morning, and gave his address. He added that Layton was giving up his luncheon hour for her, and asked her to be very punctual.

Mrs Marden went to Harley Street. She did not feel nervous, though she rea sed that

her doctor must have taken a serious view of her condition. But, as she felt no pain, she didn't believe that she could be so ill as he seemed to think. Probably, as he evidently didn't know exactly what was the matter, as he was puzzled, he imagined things might be worse with her than she believed them to be. And she knew, as he did not know, all the mental misery which she had been enduring, and which must naturally have pulled her down.

Dr Layton's house was very large. When she entered it she saw many doors. It seemed almost like a rabbit warren. When she gave her name, the man servant looked into a big book of appointments, and said,

"Yes, Ma'am, I see you are down for one o'clock. But I'm afraid you will have to wait a little."

"That doesn't matter."

He looked doubtful for a moment, then preceded her down a passage and opened a door. She saw a small room with a couch on which an elderly woman was lying stretched out flat on her back.

"Oh!" said the man servant, quickly shutting the door. "This way, Madam! That room is occupied."

He opened another door, then shut it again.

Finally he showed Mrs Marden into a long, narrow room, containing a sofa, a high, adjustable couch for medical examinations, and two or three chairs. On a small table lay a few papers and magazines. Some etchings hung on the white papered walls. He handed her the current number of "The Tatler" and left her.

She sat down and opened "The Tatler" and began to read "The Letters of Eve". The style in which Eve wrote disgusted her at that moment, and the matter of that week's letter made her wonder about women. Did they really feel interest in that sort of thing? Then she remembered her own past life, her own past interests, the fascination clothes had had for her, her love of parties, of race meetings, of matinées, of restaurants. Often her own name had appeared in those letters of Eve and she had been pleased to see it there. She had no right to condemn such frivolous gossip, to sit in judgment on those who still cared for the life that meant nothing to her now. She turned the pages and saw photographs of dancers in gardens, of women and men snapshotted in the Park, looking ridiculous with outstretched legs and hanging arms, of small children selfconsciously leaning against handsome self-conscious

mothers, of girls making large eyes and fingering ropes of pearls.

And that was life! She had been photographed with her rope of pearls. Who hadn't? She shut up the record of contemporary existence and sat still waiting. All round her no doubt were other little rooms with people waiting in them. The remembrance of the middle-aged woman lying flat on the couch came back to her. She had looked as helpless and pathetic as a little dog does when it turns on its back and shows a tooth humbly. What was the matter with her?

"And what is the matter with me?"

Well in a short time she would probably know.

Soon after half past one the door opened quickly and Doctor Layton came in.

He was a small, thick-set man, with a brown complexion, energetic brown eyes and a large powerful head.

"Mrs Marden?" he said, in a firm voice.

"Yes."

"Sorry to have kept you waiting. Doctor Simpson has told me about you."

He had taken her hand. Now he sat down beside her and began to talk. But to her surprise he did not ask her questions. He

talked about the war, labour difficulties and matters of the day, as if he had unlimited time at his disposal. Now and then he looked at her in a casual sort of way. Presently he said,

"I believe you have been doing war work."

"Just lately I have. It seems to have rather tired me out."

"I get a good many patients who tell me the same story. Well—now then——"

And he became the doctor. He began to ask questions swiftly, and listened attentively to her answers. Finally he said he must make a complete examination. He sent for a nurse, and went away for a few minutes while Mrs Marden prepared herself for the examination with the nurse's help.

. . . . . .

"That will do, thank you."

He helped Mrs Marden up from the couch, and while she was dressing he left the room again, saying,

"I'll be back in a few minutes."

Before very long he returned and the nurse went away. Mrs Marden guessed that in the meanwhile he had been seeing another patient. He brought a book with him, sat down and wrote in it with a fountain pen. At last he looked up and met Mrs Marden's eyes.

"Well?" she said. "What is the verdict?"

He looked at her for a moment in silence, and in that moment she was sure he was reading and summing up her character.

"Do you live alone?" he asked.

"Yes. I had a son but he was killed in the war."

"Yes—yes!" he muttered, moving his powerful head. "Death has become almost a commonplace in these days to many who used to think of it very differently. So many of the finest have gone."

"I suppose Death always seems commonplace to a doctor," she said.

"It doesn't to me somehow."

He leaned forward towards her with a very gentle, yet very masculine look in his eyes.

"I am not going to mince my words," he said. "I don't believe in that. You have come to me alone and it is my duty to tell you the simple truth. You are in a very dangerous condition."

"What is it?"

Then he told her.

"But—but surely—but I have felt no pain, only sometimes great weakness."

"That is quite natural. And you have of

course been losing weight rapidly for a considerable time."

"Yes. But I thought that was owing to all I had gone through—to my son's death."

"No. Your physical condition was the cause of it."

After an instant she said,

"What can be done?"

"I doubt very much if anything can be done now. The malady has been going on for some time. It has made great progress. I wish very much you had come to me earlier."

"But then——" she paused.

"There is one man who might possibly be able to do something. I wish you to see him. His name is Stanton Jayne. He is the first operator in London—for cases such as yours. We must get his opinion and abide by it. When could you see him?"

"Now if you like."

"I shall have to make arrangements with Jayne. And to-day I literally have not a moment. But I shall try to arrange for him to come here to-morrow morning. Could you be here again at one?"

"Yes."

"One moment. I'll try to get Jayne on the telephone."

Again he went out of the room.

Mrs Marden sat quite still waiting for his return. She felt astounded but vague. She was scarcely able to believe that Doctor Layton was right in his diagnosis. The absence of pain made her almost incredulous. And yet—his look, his words, his whole manner proved his absolute certainty that he could not be wrong.

"It's very strange!" she thought.

Strange—strange! The word clung to her mind. She applied it to herself and to life.

"I am strange—life is strange."

She looked about the room, thought again of the middle-aged woman lying flat on the couch, thought of Ronald, Orwyn, Miss King, the table in Hornton Street.

"And I shall be among them perhaps almost directly," she thought. "Among those whom people try to summon by sitting in the darkness at tables!"

Doctor Layton came back.

"I've got on to Jayne. He will be here to see you at one o'clock to-morrow."

Mrs Marden stood up.

"I will come then. Please, what do I owe you?"

"Three guineas, please."

She took out the money and put it in his hand. And she thought that action, too, was strange. At that moment she seemed to be paying at the turnstile for Death.

"Keep up your heart," said the doctor, in a much less professional voice. "There may be a chance."

"I wonder!" she said. "Still, I suppose it is worth trying."

"Certainly it is, or I should not advise it."

"Thank you."

As she was about to part from him something irresistible moved her to say to him,

"Doctor Layton, tell me something; do you believe that there is any life after this?"

"I used to when I was a young man."

"And now?"

"Now I doubt very much if there is. Still I may have got away from the truth as I have gone on. Science seems to me to deny that there is any other life for us but this. But there is something in many human beings which seems to give science the lie. Many dying people have puzzled me."

"Puzzled you?"

"Yes."

He looked straight before him, as if into some vast distance.

"Some of them seem to see—and perhaps they do see—what science seems to deny. It may be so."

"Thank you. I only wanted to know what you thought. I hope you will forgive me for asking."

He gripped her hand.

"Forgive you! We doctors are supposed by some of our patients to have pretty hard hearts. You see we must learn to govern ourselves. Otherwise we could scarcely continue in our profession. But the man beneath the doctor often goes so far as to weep a tear or two, believe me. I shall be keeping you in my mind."

"Thank you."

And that was all.

During the rest of that day Mrs Marden was alone. She went home, sat down and tried to realise thoroughly what had happened. She even tried to feel death in her. She thought of course about Ronald, and the desire for death which she had expressed to Miss King. Now it seemed very probable that that desire would soon be gratified. So that, even if Ronald had gone scathless in the war, she and he would have been separated in a very short time. If she had happened to be what

is called "a believer" perhaps now she would have been able to rejoice in the thought of a speedy reunion with her boy. She wondered. Then she wondered what Miss King would think of the news, what she would say when she heard it. She knew that Miss King was fond of her. She would leave her some money, would add some words to the will made long ago. But that will left almost everything she possessed to Ronald. A new will would have to be made.

Was Death in her really? She knew that even great doctors sometimes made bad mistakes. Well she would be quite certain tomorrow. She realised that, even now, she did not feel like one under sentence of death. It seemed to her just then impossible that she was going to die very soon, that the house which had contained her so long was going to be left without a mistress, that Henriette, Hanson, and the other servants would have to seek new service.

Presently Hanson brought in her tea. She remembered his obvious grief at Ronald's death, and wondered whether he would be equally sorry if she were to die. As he was about to leave the room she said,

"Hanson!"

"Yes, Ma'am——?"

"Tell me—do you think I look ill?"

The butler looked very much embarrassed.

"Poor Mr Ronald's death has pulled you down, Ma'am, I think."

"No, it isn't that."

"Ma'am?"

"I am very ill."

"Oh, Ma'am, I hope not!"

"Well, Hanson, we can't live for ever."

Hanson now looked acutely shocked.

"I'm sure, Ma'am, I hope you have a great many years before you," he said.

After a pause he added,

"We couldn't do without you, Ma'am, really."

"Would you be sorry if I were to die?"

"Oh, Ma'am, please don't say such a thing! I don't like to hear it. You ought to get about more, Ma'am, if I may say so."

"How do you mean?"

"Go more among people, Ma'am, as you used to. You were such a favourite with everybody."

"There's not much in that."

"Ma'am?"

"That will do, Hanson, thank you. You needn't say anything to the other servants."

"Oh, Ma'am, I should never let any gossip about you pass my lips."

He left the room quite shaken. Apparently he was very human, as some doctors were. Class-masks are often deceiving. How strange was the nakedness under the clothes! Perhaps Hanson really had a place in his heart for his mistress, for the mother of Mr Ronald of whom he had been "very fond".

In the evening of that day Mrs Marden played "patience" successfully. Then she went up to bed.

Hitherto she had felt almost wonderfully calm, considering what had happened that day. But now, as she faced the night, she was seized with panic. The quiet of the house, the knowledge that all those in it, except herself, were probably sleeping, the thought of their healthy bodies, whilst hers was obscurely ravaged by an implacable disease, terrified and angered her. She could not keep still. She walked to and fro in the room. Waves of heat seemed to roll over her. They were succeeded by a sensation of glacial cold. She felt hideously alone, isolated absolutely from every living creature, and from God, if there were a God. Passages from Haeckel burned their way through her memory. When she

had read them she had had no thought of trying to learn them by heart. Yet apparently her mind had tenaciously retained them without her knowledge, and now used them as a weapon to torment her.

"Among thoughtful physicians the conviction that the existence of the soul came to an end at death has been common for centuries" . . . "It was the gigantic progress of biology in the present century that finally destroyed the myth" . . . "Now, indeed, it is rarely that an informed and honourable biologist is found to defend the immortality of the soul" . . . "It"—i.e. the belief in immortality—"is not found in Buddhism, the religion that dominates thirty per cent of the entire human race." "When we come to analyse all the different proofs that have been urged for the immortality of the soul, we find that not a single one is consistent with the truth we have learnt in the last few decades from physiological psychology and the theory of descent." . . . "All—proofs . . . are in a parlous condition; they are definitely annulled by the scientific criticism of the last few decades." . . .

How terrible memory is! She tried to think of the Bible, to remember consoling passages

from that greatest of all books. But her mind, obstinate as are all self-tormentors, swerved away from it. Again the waves of heat rolled over her, and almost frantically, she went to the window, roughly pulled back the silk curtains which concealed it, with a sharp tug sent up the blind, and leaned out to breathe in the night air.

Hans Place was deserted except for a policeman, who was standing under a shrouded lamp at a short distance away. Mrs Marden longed to call out to him for help. How mad he would think her! And perhaps she was almost mad at this moment. She leaned with both her thin arms on the window frame and opened the front of her dressing gown.

Presently the policeman moved slowly away with a heavy assured tread, and was taken by the darkness of the night. After an interval she heard a faint noise in the distance. It grew rapidly louder. Two not bright lamps came in sight. Then a large shut motor glided by just beneath her and quickly disappeared. Perhaps people she knew were in it, some of those among whom she was a "favourite". If they could see their favourite, the seller of souvenirs, now!

After a long while she felt cooler, then presently cold. She drew in. But she left the

blind up and the curtains drawn back. She could not bear to be enclosed in a room with no outlet which she could see. A room at night is like a coffin sometimes. She did not lie down, but she stopped walking about and forced herself to sit down in an armchair. And there she remained the whole of the night, occasionally getting up for a moment to drink a little cold water, and to put eau de cologne on her forehead and hands. In the chill of the dawn she got into bed. As she lay there she broke out into a profuse perspiration. This was the day when the final verdict would be pronounced upon her. She writhed with a terror which seemed now almost entirely physical.

"Evidently I am a coward!" she thought, with a sense of profound humiliation. "I never knew that before. I gave birth to a hero, but I am a coward."

Well, Ronald would never know that. Late in the dawn, and without any warning of change, she suddenly fell fast asleep.

When she awoke she knew immediately that she had to go to Harley Street that day to hear her fate from the lips of Mr Jayne.

She got through the morning somehow, looking perpetually at the moving hands of the clock like a condemned criminal. Just after

half past twelve—too soon no doubt—she set out for the doctor's house.

When she got there she said to the man servant,

"Please don't show me into a wrong room to-day."

He looked startled and very uncomfortable, but he only said, with a certain stiffness,

"No, Ma'am, certainly not."

And he took her to a large and handsome waiting room, where three people were sitting uneasily. She sat down there and picked up the current number of "Punch".

At a quarter past one—two out of the three people had left the room meanwhile—the man servant came for her, and she was shown into a square, rather bright room, where Doctor Layton was standing with a very tall fair man of about thirty six, much younger than she had expected.

"This is Mr Stanton Jayne—Mrs Marden," said Doctor Layton.

"Come to give me my death warrant, I suppose," said Mrs Marden, with a smile.

"I hope not indeed," said the surgeon, bending to her. "My main business is the saving of lives."

"Well, you must tell me whether you think

you can save mine. Not that it really matters very much, for I am not of much use in the world, and haven't a great deal to live for."

"Only Hanson!" went through her mind, as she said this.

"I hope I may be able to save you for many a long year," said the surgeon, gently but firmly. "Now let us see."

. . . . . .

A little later Mrs Marden listened to the verdict. Mr Jayne said that he would have to undertake an exploratory operation before he could tell for certain whether a larger operation could be effective in eliminating the dreadful malady she was suffering from.

"Is it worth while, really worth while for me to undergo it?" she asked.

"Yes, I think it is. But I cannot promise that any further operation will be advisable, or even possible."

"And will it be very severe?"

"Not very severe. And it will not take very long."

"Then I suppose I had better make up my mind to it."

So it was settled. And Mrs Marden eventually left the house still ignorant whether she was to die or to live.

CHAPTER XI

It had been arranged that Mrs Marden should go to a nursing home near Cavendish Square for the preliminary operation which was to take place three days later. Doctor Layton had undertaken to settle everything. She had two more days of freedom before her. On arriving at her house she telephoned to her solicitor asking him to come to her as soon as possible to draw up a new will. He came. She did not tell him that she was in danger of death, but simply that owing to the death of her son it had become necessary to make a new disposition of her money and property. He quite agreed that she ought to do this, and they went together into all the details.

"I wish to sign the will immediately," she said. "When can it be ready?"

"How soon do you want it?"

"Not later than the day after to-morrow."

The lawyer looked at her with some curiosity.

"One never knows what may happen," she said carelessly. "And I ought to have thought of all this weeks ago."

"Exactly. Yes, yes, I quite understand."

But he went away still looking curious, and with a manner rather oppressed.

When he had gone Mrs Marden considered whether she should telephone to her sister. She supposed that she ought to do so. But she dreaded her sister's sorrow. Annie would probably cry, would begin to talk about religion, would want her to see a clergyman. She decided not to tell Annie. It might be unsisterly, but she couldn't help that. Should she summon Miss King? She had not said a word to her friend yet. Miss King did not know she had seen any doctor. She would have to tell her; she would tell her, but not now. She would wait till to-morrow. But there was someone she wanted to see, someone she felt she must see, if possible. It was Peter Orwyn. Arthur Burnley had told her that Orwyn had gone away and had left no address. But several days had elapsed since Burnley's visit to her. Orwyn might have returned. She resolved to find out, and she went to the telephone and asked for his number. In two or three minutes she was put through to Hornton Street, and heard a voice say,

"'Ello?"

"Who is that?" she asked.

"Mr Horwyn's servant. 'Oo his it, please?"

"Mrs Marden."

"'Oo—please?"

"Mrs Marden."

"Oh, Mrs Marding! Yes?"

"Is Mr Orwyn in London?"

"Yes, Mum. 'E's just come back."

"I wish to speak to him, please, if he's at home."

"I'll tell 'im, Mum."

So he had returned! She waited with the receiver in her hand. Presently she heard Orwyn's voice saying,

"Do you want me, Mrs Marden?"

"Yes. I want very much to see you."

After a perceptible pause the voice said,

"May I ask why?"

"I must see you. Don't refuse me. And I want you, I beg you to come to me."

"I am not very well. I am not seeing anyone at present."

"I quite understand. But I beg you to come. I may not have a chance of ever seeing you again."

"You are going away?"

"I'm dangerously ill."

"What is that?"

"I am very ill, and I must speak to you. I'm sure you won't refuse me. I have to go to a

nursing home almost immediately and I can't go without seeing you. Will you come?"

"I'm very sorry—very sorry!"

"Will you come?"

"But what could I do? I'm—I'm quite broken up. I'm unfit to be with anyone."

"No one will be here but myself. Do please come."

Perhaps he felt the intensity of her voice even through the telephone, for he said,

"Very well. But I'm afraid I cannot help you. I cannot help anyone really."

"I beg you to come."

"Very well, I will. But——"

"Thank you. At once?"

"I will come as soon as possible."

"Thank you. I shall stay here. I shall expect you."

There were no further words from Orwyn, so she put the receiver up.

An hour passed. He had not come. After waiting for half an hour more she went again to the telephone and enquired if Peter Orwyn were in. She received the answer, from the maid, that he had just left his house.

"Do you know where he is going?" she asked.

"No, Mum, Mr Horwyn didn't say."

Mrs Marden hoped he was on his way to her, but she felt no certainty. However she could do nothing more. Again she sat down to wait. It seemed to her that she was always waiting now. But probably a definite end would be put to all that very soon. The clumsy business of life would perhaps be over for her in a short time, possibly within a few days. If Orwyn did not come to her now she resolved that she would visit him on the morrow. He should not escape her. She must see him. She would not die without trying to clear up certain mysteries which, since she had been with the doctors, had hung about her mind like veils. Now she knew what she carried within her she felt an importunate necessity to get through to a little more light before facing the great darkness. Many things, the greatest things, she could never understand, but there were some things she must try to understand. And at this moment she knew she had within her a will which Orwyn would not be able to resist if they met. She did not mean to ask for his pity, but she was resolved to be pitiless with him. She would make him tell her the truth.

It was evening when at last Hanson came to tell her that Mr Orwyn had called and wished to see her.

"Please show him in," she said.

When Orwyn entered she looked at him in astonishment. He was almost incredibly altered. The natural red of his large face was mottled with patches of sallow white. His mouth was drawn down; his broad body seemed to have shrunk; his dark eyes had lost their characteristic look of steady earnestness and were now dull, furtive, and horribly distressed; his hair was untidy with an irregular parting evidently made by a shaking hand; his clothes were dusty, and between his not very clean collar and his tie there was a gap which showed his collar stud. All the firmness and calm self-possession were gone from his gait and manner. And he looked much older, older by years, than when she had first seen him in Lady Terrerton's drawing-room. As Hanson went out and shut the door they stood facing one another —altered both of them, noting, both of them, the changes physical and mental which their bodies and faces showed.

Orwyn did not hold out his hand to her and she did not offer to take it. He was the first to speak.

"What is it?" he asked, in a heavy voice.

He cleared his throat.

"Why did you want to see me, Mrs Marden?"

"Please sit down and I will tell you."

He dropped into a chair like a tired man.

"I'm sorry to hear you are ill," he said. "I've been away. I didn't know."

"Nobody knows but you and the doctors. My own sister doesn't know. I've told no one but you."

She sat down.

"I want you to understand how ill I am. I have a deadly disease. There's very little chance of saving my life—perhaps none at all. I shall know about that this week. I am going to have an operation to find out."

"I am very sorry, very sorry," said Orwyn, with a sort of dull sincerity. "Misery everywhere—it's almost unbearable. I don't know how human beings bear what they do without sinking under it. I have lost my Harry, and now you are in mortal trouble."

He paused, seemed to think for a moment, like a man making an effort to gather the forces of his mind, and then said,

"Why have you sent for me to tell me this grievous news? After what happened the other day I can't understand it. I thought I should never hear from you again. I have but few

friends and I know that now I cannot number you among them."

"I have told you because I don't think you will tell any untruths to a probably dying woman, and because my mind is disturbed."

"What about?"

"I'll tell you. Since my last visit to you I've seen Mr Burnley."

Orwyn shifted in his seat and looked down on the ground.

"I told him what had happened between me and you that day."

A dull flush went over Orwyn's mottled face. He clasped his large hands together, then unclasped them.

"He wouldn't believe that what you had said was true. He said you spoke under the influence of emotion, that you didn't know what you were saying. He was very angry with me, I think. We parted like strangers. Since then, and since I have seen the doctors, I have felt that perhaps there was something of truth in what Mr Burnley said, that possibly both he and I may have fallen into exaggeration. I don't wish to be a fool, like so many women, but I—I don't wish to throw away anything which might be of the least help to me now. I do need help—hope—terribly. Am I wrong

in one thing? I suppose you have played tricks to deceive me. You must have told me lies. You have practically acknowledged that yourself. But have you not really some strange powers in you which you don't understand but which you feel, know of? At times I have felt them, or seemed to feel them, so strongly that even now, after your own confession, I cannot believe that you are just like other people, like Mr Burnley, or myself, or Mr Hammond, or even like Larrington. You must tell me, Mr Orwyn, whether I am right or wrong. You can't have the heart to refuse now, or to tell a lie to a woman in my condition, who really has nothing to cling to. But"—suddenly she spoke with a sharp, almost fiercely suspicious voice—"I want no consoling lies. I won't accept lies. I would rather die hopeless than die clinging to nonsensical illusions."

She stopped. Then she said,

"I pitied Mr Burnley, though I daresay he thought I laughed at him in my mind. But is there any reason at all in his faith in you? Have you any exceptional powers?"

Peter Orwyn lifted his head and met her eyes.

"Yes," he said.

And, as he said it, to Mrs Marden his voice

sounded almost as deeply firm, as quietly assured, as on the day when she had first heard it.

"You have! What is their nature?"

"I don't understand them myself."

A spark of hope was kindled in Mrs Marden's breast.

"But then—that day—do you mean you denied your own powers? Was it as Mr Burnley said? Were you so overwhelmed by the death of your son that you talked at random?"

He shook his head.

"No."

Suddenly Mrs Marden felt a dreadful sensation of mortal weakness, as if vitality sank away from her, like a wave that recedes. It seemed almost like the approach of death. Orwyn, who had his eyes now fixed upon her, got up, swiftly for so heavy a man.

"What is it?" he said. "What can I do?"

She held out her thin arms to him.

"Help me to the sofa. Put me lying down."

He put his powerful arms round her, helped her up from her chair, and almost carried her to a sofa. She lay down on it, and he carefully placed a cushion under her head.

"Let me send for a doctor," he said.

"No—no."

"Then let me——"

"No. Sit by me. I shall be better in a minute. I've never been like this before. But —I've had to go through a good deal——"

He sat down close beside her. She lay quite still for a few minutes with her eyes shut. Presently she opened them, and sat up, pushing herself up with the help of both hands, but keeping her feet on the sofa.

"Now tell me!" she said.

"But you're not fit to——"

"Yes, I am. I want to know. I must know."

"What do you wish to know?"

"I wish to know what led you to become a medium."

"I can't tell you everything. It would take too long."

"Tell me all you can."

"It began with my going to a friend, who had been troubled with odd noises in his house. He consulted me about them. I was a minister then, a Baptist—afterwards I joined the Salvation Army."

"I know. Lady Terrerton told me."

"He wished me to exorcise whatever it was that caused the noises. He was a superstitious man. I tried. I went to the house and prayed.

But the noises continued. Then someone advised my friend to 'sit' and try to find out, by sitting, who was in the house. He asked me to sit with him. I had never done such a thing. I knew nothing about such matters. But I consented, and we sat, with two other people. The very first time I sat I fell into a trance. It was like going to sleep. I couldn't help it. I was not aware of doing anything when I was in the trance. But the noises in the house ceased. To this day I don't know why. After that, from time to time I sat with other people. Sometimes I fell asleep, but often not. But when I was awake I felt inclined to write. They gave me paper and pencil. And I wrote a lot of queer things. Sometimes I answered questions, and often correctly. Then I began to answer mental questions. People began to hear about me. One thing led to another, and at last—I—I saw there was money in it."

She was silent.

"I had the two boys. I wanted to do the best for them. I was a poor man——"

"I understand."

"The spiritualists got hold of me. I was told I was a powerful medium. Eventually I gave up everything to follow up that—mediumship."

"And you took to trickery?"

"People wanted it. They aren't easily satisfied. They want things that surprise them. Truth by itself doesn't satisfy most people."

"Poor things!"

"So I began to give them what they wanted."

"But what is genuine in the things you do?"

"I don't know myself what happens when I fall into a trance."

"Do you sometimes pretend to be in a trance when you are not?"

"Yes."

"Have you with me?"

"Yes. It is only now and then that I feel I must go off. Certain people help me. Others seem to hold me back."

"Does Mr Burnley help you?"

"Yes, very much. But I couldn't do certain things when Mr Hammond was there."

"Did my friend, Miss King, help you or hinder you?"

"I call her negative. She seemed shut up and locked, like a box might be. I could never get anything from her. But she wasn't quite like Mr Hammond. He was antagonistic somehow."

"Tell me about the voices please."

"They come to me."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I feel I want to speak with different sorts of voices, sometimes one, sometimes another."

"But that voice—like my son's?"

"It came in my mouth after a while."

"Not at first?"

"I knew your son was in the Guards. Lady Terrerton told me that before ever I saw you."

"Did you try to imitate a certain type of voice?"

"Well, I've met a lot of young soldiers, Guardsmen some of them. In the war a surprising lot of officers came to see me."

"I thought of that. For a long time I thought just that," Mrs Marden said, in a tired voice. "And then, by degrees, I began to feel——"

She looked hard at Orwyn. He answered the question in her eyes.

"You helped me," he said. "After a bit, you seemed to be sending me the very voice."

"That's your power?" she said. "You have a wonderful faculty of stealing knowledge from those who sit with you?"

"That's what I think. It seems to come to me from certain people, as if it was passed out of them into me."

"It comes from them, not from the other world."

"Ah!" said Orwyn heavily.

"Do you know what made me believe? It was the way you laughed once. It was exactly like my son's laugh."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Orwyn. "I seemed to get very near to your mind."

"My subconscious mind, perhaps."

"That's it, in my belief."

"And that's how you seemed to know things that only my son and I knew?"

"That must be it. I don't think most people have any idea how mind can flow into mind, as it were. I have a power of receiving what most people can't receive. And that enables me to give out."

"So it's all purely natural—mysterious but natural."

"I suppose so."

"And you have pretended that it was what people call supernatural?"

"I don't know what happens when I am asleep."

"Have you ever gone into a real trance when I have been with you?"

After a long pause of hesitation Orwyn answered,

"No. First Hammond, and then your friend, Miss King, seemed to prevent it."

"That's all I wished to know. Thank you!" she said quietly.

After a moment Orwyn got up.

"Shall I go?" he asked, standing by the sofa, with his arms hanging down, and his head bent.

"Yes, please. But I want to ask you something. I want you to give it up."

"I have given it up. After Harry—a little before he died—Harry wrote me a letter. He wouldn't wish—I couldn't do it now he might know."

"Then you think he still exists somewhere?"

"Oh yes. I'm a believer."

"You spoke to me once about prayer."

"Yes. I pray every day."

"And yet you have been—how strange everything is!"

"We are all mixed up of good and bad. But I shall continue praying."

As he was about to go she said,

"Forgive me for asking but have you something to live on?"

"I have a little money put by. I shall find something to do. I can work. Harry would have been glad to see me working in another way."

"Yes," she said.

Then he went away.

. . . . . .

During the time that elapsed before the operation Mrs Marden felt much calmer than she had expected to feel, indeed almost tranquil. The interview with Orwyn had put an end to her feverish unrest. Now she knew! It was much better so. One can rest on knowledge, on truth, even if it destroys hope, even if it slays expectation. She thought about that, and was surprised to find how much she valued truth now that she was facing a big thing, a thing from which there was no escape. She had forgiven Peter Orwyn, and had no longer any feeling of bitterness towards him. And she knew that he would keep his word, that he would never again throw dust in the eyes of poor people seeking for consolation in their troubles. His assertion of belief had impressed her perhaps more than she realised. She was quite certain he really believed that his dead son probably was able to know what he was doing. Henceforth he would live for Harry, to win Harry's approval or at any rate to avoid Harry's condemnation. And yet he had told her that once "they" had gone West they could never come back. It was odd that he had been

able to pray all through that career of his, that career of dishonesty and lies, and no doubt to pray with sincerity. But almost everything connected with human beings was mysterious. Impossible to plumb the depths of even the shallowest man, the most frivolous woman!

She sent for her sister. Annie came and was told the news. She was shocked. For a moment she was unable to express her feelings. Then she cried, kissed her sister, and—of course—begged her to see a clergyman. But Mrs Marden gently refused.

"I want to be quiet," she said. "I don't feel afraid any more. I was terrified one night. I felt almost as if I were going mad with terror, but that has all gone. I'm not even exactly unhappy now."

"I don't understand!"

"Nor do I, Annie! But a sort of peace has come to me. I've never felt anything just like it before. Perhaps it is because I shall soon share my boy's fate. Somehow the thought of that seems to bring us nearer together."

"You mean you feel you may be going to join him?"

"No; it isn't that. But I may soon be as he is. And I suppose any sort of sharing brings with it a feeling of nearness. If Ronald

had been blinded, as so many men have been in the war, I think I should have hated being able to see. Real love likes to share even misfortunes, I think."

"Darling, I want you to live, but if that may not be, I hope you will share the glory with poor Ronald."

"If you think Ronald is in glory how can you call him poor?"

For a moment Annie looked rather confused and uncomfortable. "Oh, I don't know," she murmured. "One gets into the habit—I suppose—when people are dead."

"Never mind, Annie."

"And you really won't see a clergyman? I know one, Father Burch, who is most helpful."

"No, I would rather not. I want to think for myself."

"How strange you are, dear!"

Mrs Marden could not help smiling. How the sense of humour persists! It cannot die even on the edge of the grave.

When Annie had gone Mrs Marden considered whether she should let Miss King know. Since she had taken up the work at the hospital she had given up having Miss King in the mornings to go through the letters. They had

met only as friends. In a way she wanted to see Emily. She was very fond of her; she trusted her and respected her thoroughly. But she now felt reluctant to see her. Solitude seemed best just then, seemed almost necessary to her. She had an instinct to avoid all influences. She did not want Miss King or anyone to think for her, or even to put thoughts into her mind. Eventually, she decided against sending for Miss King. And she spent her remaining time in Hans Place alone.

Of course the servants all knew now. They seemed very distressed. Evidently they had got to like her. Henriette cried, but said she knew her mistress would recover and be better than she had ever been before. Hanson was much upset by the whole thing, and showed it in a respectful and unemphatic way. The butler held the human being in decent control, but the human being was obviously there. Mrs Marden felt almost fond of Hanson. She told him she had left him a handsome legacy in her will. This seemed to upset him more than ever, and when he thanked her for her consideration she distinctly saw moisture in his pale eyes.

The solicitor came with the will. She signed it, and made him write in a short codicil, which was also witnessed and signed. By this she

left a small sum of money to Peter Orwyn of 11 B Hornton Street, Kensington, W. It was, perhaps, her tribute to Harry.

When all was done she had one more night in Hans Place.

She had fancied that perhaps her feeling of panic would return now that she was drawing so near to the operation which would decide whether she had, or had not, a chance to live on. She had feared its return. And when the evening fell, and the summer darkness closed in, she sat like one waiting for the arrival of a guest. But that dreaded guest did not come. She felt almost oddly simple and calm, and not so lonely as usual. Her anguish about the loss of Ronald was lessened in an extraordinary degree. If he had been alive he would have been suffering now. He had been tremendously fond of her, though he had seldom, or never, shown it in at all a sentimental way. His affection had rather been demonstrated by comradeship, "palliness", by his readiness to go about with her, to share his pleasures with her. She had never had to "tout" for a dinner or a visit to the theatre with Ronald. On the contrary he had generally been the one who had suggested the companionship in pleasure which had been such a bond between them. It would have been hor-

rible to see Ronald in mental pain. She was spared that now.

As the evening drew on the sense of a new nearness to Ronald, of which she had spoken to her sister, increased within her, and she began to be surprised by it, to ask herself why she should feel it so definitely. Even when she had listened to the voice in Peter Orwyn's room, believing that it was her son's voice, she had not had a greater feeling of his nearness to her than she had this evening; indeed, probably because now she was quite alone, there was something more intimate in it—she fancied—than when the voice had spoken. It was almost as if Ronald were coming to the house, or were actually in the house with her. She sat like one who listens for a familiar footstep; she looked towards the door like one expecting it to open. Her body felt very weak and tired but her mind, though still calm, was alert.

Presently Henriette came, with a cautious tread, to ask how she was feeling and whether she wanted anything. Mrs Marden said,

"No, nothing, thank you, Henriette."

"Madame ought to have had someone with her this evening," said the maid, in a sympathetic voice.

Mrs Marden nearly said, "I have," but checked herself, wondering.

"I prefer to be alone," she said. "I am quite contented as I am."

"Madame is very brave!"

Mrs Marden smiled.

"These things aren't always so terrible as we expect them to be."

"That is the good God!" said Henriette, who was a pious Catholic, and she went out looking relieved. She was certainly a devout believer. So was Annie. And yet both of them seemed more upset than she was, and Annie had called Ronald "poor" when speaking of him in glory. Good Christians were sometimes rather difficult to understand thoroughly. They seemed to have a great aversion for death.

Did she, or did she not, want to live on? She certainly did not wish to suffer pain, but did she wish to be saved by the surgeon? She scarcely knew. But to-night she did not feel any ardour for life, or any keen fear of death. And Ronald seemed to have something to do with that, too. She could not share life with him if she lived. Perhaps, if she were to be once more a strong, active woman, she would again be tormented by her loss. It did not

torment her now. She looked again towards the drawing-room door. She was very fanciful to-night.

She recalled her interview with Orwyn. The abrupt attack of physical weakness—a dying away of all her bodily powers it had seemed for a moment—which had prostrated her while he was with her had been brought on, she felt sure, entirely by the shock to her mind he had given when he had denied the truth of Arthur Burnley's assertion. Her physical malady had had nothing to do with that. So she had really been holding on still, however weakly, however vaguely, to hope then. Orwyn had knocked away the hope, and she had felt "This is the end". How was it that now, without any hope, she felt as she did? She could not understand. It was absolutely inexplicable. Did she, like Haeckel, look forward to eternal sleep, to that nothingness in which all the affections and desires, all the sorrows, too, of humanity fall into dust with the flesh? It seemed as if it must be so. Yet she did not feel that it was so. For she was aware of something like expectation, as if there were still something for her, a future of some kind. Nothingness did not seem to be near her. She really had no consciousness of drawing near to an end.

At last she got up to go to bed. She moved slowly and feebly, and looked round the familiar room as she went to the door; saying good-bye to its evening intimacy. She opened the door and switched off the lights. Then she went up to Ronald's bedroom. She stayed there for a few minutes just looking at it quite calmly. Then she went to her room. Before she got into bed she knelt for a little while by the bed, with her hands over her face, not praying but waiting. Nothing seemed to come to her, unless it was perhaps a greater calmness.

"I suppose I am not such a coward as I believed myself to be," she thought.

She was glad of that. She knew now that she would behave quite decently—that was a favourite word of Ronald's—in the nursing home. The nurses, the doctors, would have no reason to be ashamed for her, or to wonder about her. From somewhere strength and self-possession had certainly come to her. She knew she would sleep that night.

And she slept well.

In the morning, when she awoke, the feeling of calm had not left her.

. . . . . .

When Mrs Marden recovered full consciousness after the operation, and was able to under-

stand what had happened, and to know that her fate must now have been definitely decided by the surgeon, she asked, without any anxiety, to be told the truth about her condition. The surgeon had already gone away, to perform another operation, but Doctor Layton was with her. He had also been away, leaving her with another doctor who helped him in his work, but had returned to the home to explain matters to her, and to see how she was.

He sat down by the bed, and his brown eyes, full of experience, looked at her with steady kindness. There was a manly strength in their gaze which seemed looking, not doubtfully, for strength in her.

The nurse had left the room for a moment.

"Well?" she said.

She did not know whether her voice was strong or weak.

"Do you feel quite easy?" he asked.

"I think so. The sickness has left me."

"You mustn't talk much."

"No. I don't want to. Just tell me."

"It will not be necessary to perform another operation."

After lying quite still in silence for a moment, she said,

"I understand. It has gone too far."

He put one hand gently on hers.

"Yes."

"Shall I be able to go home again?"

"Yes, later on."

"Thank you. That is what I wanted to know."

"I don't think you will suffer very much."

"I'm glad."

There was a gentle tap at the door. The nurse had returned.

"I will go and speak to your sister," said the doctor. "She is waiting downstairs."

"Annie! She will cry. Tell her not to. There is nothing to cry about. I think I knew how it would be."

"Do you wish to see her for a moment?"

"No. But please tell her *you* don't wish it. I want to be very quiet."

"I will tell her."

He was standing up by the bed looking down at her. There seemed to be a deep question in his eyes.

"It's strange," she almost whispered. "When these things come they are not like what we expect them to be."

He moved his head.

"That is so. I have noticed it many times."

Before he went out he said,

"When you go home I shall come to see you."

"Annie wants me to see a clergyman. But I would rather talk to you."

Then she closed her eyes. As he went out he let the nurse in.

. . . . . .

When Mrs Marden went back to Hans Place a nurse accompanied her to attend upon her until the end came. It was doubtful how long she would live. Doctor Layton said to her that she might live for two, or even for three months, but perhaps not so long. It was impossible to be certain. The servants had been told of her condition by Annie. But Miss King only knew as yet that her friend had been ill and had undergone a not very severe operation. It was now, however, obviously necessary to tell her the whole truth. Not to do so would be unfriendly. And on the day after her return home Mrs Marden wrote to Emily and asked her to come.

When she arrived Mrs Marden was lying down on the sofa in her bedroom. The nurse had gone out to get some fresh air. Miss King came in with an anxious look on her face.

"What's the matter?" she asked, as she

came up to the sofa and took her friend's hand. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"That I had taken your advice and consulted a doctor? Something held me back, but not any unfriendliness, Emily. I thought I would wait till I was here, till I knew everything. I had to tell my sister. Peter Orwyn was the only other person who knew, except of course the doctors. Sit down, Emily."

Miss King sat down by the sofa.

"You told Mr Orwyn, and not me!"

"I felt I must tell him, because I wished to know exactly what he was. And I thought he would be truthful to me when he knew my condition."

"But are you very ill? Hasn't the operation been successful?"

"It was only done to find out exactly what was the matter, that is to find out how far my malady had gone."

"What is the matter?"

Then Mrs Marden told her.

Miss King looked shocked, horrified even. She turned pale, got up, walked to the window and stood with her back to Mrs Marden. Mrs Marden saw her feeling for something. Then she took out a handkerchief and lifted it to her face. When she turned round her eyes

were red, and she looked as if she had a bad cold. Her boyish look was gone. She came back and sat down again, but she said nothing.

"Peter Orwyn told me the truth, Emily. You were quite right about him. He has strange powers but—Ronald never came."

Miss King looked down. Tears ran down over her face. She began hurriedly to wipe them away. Mrs Marden felt vaguely surprised at her grief. She was quite unable to share it.

"I knew you were ill," Miss King said, "but I didn't expect this."

"Nor did I. But—isn't it odd—I don't feel as if I minded it."

"Are you in pain?"

"No. But I feel very weak often."

"Will it—will it be long?"

"The doctor thinks not very long."

"I can scarcely believe it. I shall miss you dreadfully. Oh, how selfish we are!"

"I don't think you are a selfish woman."

"Yes, I am! Yes, I am! You are a great deal to me and I dread losing you. Oh, I hope you won't suffer!"

"Probably I shan't. I don't want to. It's so ugly."

After a silence Mrs Marden said,

"My sister, Annie, very much wants me to see a clergyman."

Miss King put away her handkerchief and settled her collar and tie. She began to look boyish again, and was evidently making a strong effort to control her grief.

"Has it—all this—made any difference in your outlook on certain things?" she asked.

"Yes, I think it has, a great difference. But I don't want a clergyman. I feel I must not be interfered with. I don't seem to want anyone's thoughts put into me. I think that is why I didn't tell you before. I didn't want any influence. I distrust influence."

"Dear, I shall not try to influence you. You needn't be afraid of me."

"I know. And I am not afraid of you now."

"But—what is the difference?"

"Well, I feel very calm, and very simple."

"Only that?"

"I am not at all frightened. And I feel much nearer to Ronald. I can't understand why."

"Nothing else?"

"I don't feel a bit afraid of God, or as if I had been a very evil woman, or as if I ought to prepare especially for death and be dreadfully sorry for things I have done. I regret having

been so useless all my life and wish I had done more kindnesses to people and not thought so much always about myself. But that's all."

"But don't you believe in the after life now?"

"I could scarcely say I do. It wouldn't be quite true to say that. But I cannot feel as if I were coming entirely to an end. But perhaps no one can."

"If it is so, mustn't that mean something?"

"It may, I suppose. But I don't know. I fancy we all have ideas—feelings—which are born out of our desires."

"Then you do want to go on living somewhere else?"

"Yes."

"I know you will."

"My sister thinks *poor* Ronald is living in glory."

"Poor!"

"She put it like that. Sometimes good Christians seem very much afraid of death, much more than I am. Would you like me to see a clergyman, Emily?"

Miss King looked searchingly at her for a moment and then said,

"No. I feel your instinct was right. You will find the way for yourself with the help—I mean that you are not like most people.

There's something independent in you which can't lean, which perhaps oughtn't to try to lean. I can't help you, dear, and I daresay no clergyman could. And I do love you for your sincerity. I'm sure the greatest thing anyone can do is to strive after absolute sincerity. And you are absolutely sincere."

"So are you."

"I wish to be."

"I daresay Annie is, too, in her way. But I think she has the sort of mind which wants to be dressed by other people, and doesn't trust its own taste. You understand me, but she never could. Once I told her I wanted to think things out for myself."

"What did she say?"

"She said, 'How strange you are, dear.' So —you see!"

"It's much better to think them out for oneself. But I hope you won't resist conviction."

"Perhaps I might have done that once, but I don't think I should now."

"I only mean that after being so deceived——"

"By Peter Orwyn?"

"Yes, you might distrust a belief even if you seemed to feel it in you, or—or coming to you."

"Emily, I'm quite sure that if such a belief

as you mean ever did come to me I should accept it without questioning, because no human being would have anything to do with it. There would be no intermediary—no Peter Orwyn who had helped me to be convinced. After my experience with Mr Orwyn I could never be really helped by a human being, because I distrust all human beings now in a way; either their good faith, or if not that, their good sense, or their brain power, or their soul power. If a clergyman were to come to me I should feel as if he were another kind of medium with another bag of tricks. It sounds horrid, I know. Some people would think me almost blasphemous, I daresay, but you know what I mean. If there is a God who has any personal knowledge of my existence and my trouble I want no intermediary to come between Him and me. That's non-Christian of course. I suppose I am not a Christian. But "—she raised herself slightly on the sofa, and her eyes shone—" I hate intermediaries as much as some poor people hate the middlemen. I don't want an intercessor. I don't want any paraphernalia to remind me of Orwyn's rattle and concertina. I'm listening alone in a bare place. Probably I shall die without hearing any voice. But I shall just go on listening quite alone there. And as I told you

I have a strange feeling—there—of being not far from Ronald."

"But then you do think he still has some existence?"

"I couldn't say that even. It is merely a feeling and seems to have nothing to do with the mind. It's like a physical feeling."

"That's very strange!" said Miss King.

She gazed at her friend with questioning eyes. But Mrs Marden said,

"I don't think I can explain much more. It's almost as if my body were aware of something that my mind knew nothing about. It's rather like feeling someone is near you in the dark when you can neither hear nor see him, and when you have no reason to suppose he is near. You seem to feel it with your skin."

A faint smile went over her thin face, and she added,

"That doesn't sound very spiritual or very mystic, does it? But that's just how I feel."

"I have never felt anything like that," said Miss King, and then, as if by mutual consent unexpressed in words, the two friends talked of other things.

Miss King noted with growing surprise the genuine calm which possessed Mrs Marden.

It was not a seraphic calm such as is often represented as coming to people not far from death. There was nothing celestial about it. To Miss King it seemed like a curiously complete self-possession of the soul, which made her friend somehow almost new to her, as if, since she had known she was ill, she had somehow achieved authority. Miss King had never seen anything quite like it before. And it struck her as exceptionally strange in one who had no definite religion to cling to, who had not even any conviction that after the death of the body life would persist on another plane. But she did not express her surprise to her friend. By nature she was reserved; generally she found it not easy to tell. It was still less easy to ask.

At first Mrs Marden was able to go out in a bath-chair, and she was sometimes drawn into the Park, and stayed there under the trees for awhile. It was fine summer weather and she sat and watched the people go by. But she made her chairman avoid the more fashionable parts of the Park, where she would be likely to see her friends and acquaintances. She was not entirely forgotten by them, and there were often enquiries made for her in Hans Place. But she wished to be forgotten. She had no longing for company. She, who had once lived

among people and had hated to be alone, now preferred solitude.

One day, when she was sitting in her chair under the trees, Cecil Hammond came in sight. He was sauntering along and slowly approached her. When he was almost close to her he sent her a casual look. For a moment apparently he did not recognise her, and seemed about to go on. But as she returned his glance he looked puzzled. She bowed. He took off his hat, still looking puzzled. Then evidently he realised who she was, and a momentary expression of strong surprise came into his face. He stopped, seemed to hesitate, then came up to her chair.

"Mrs Marden!" he said.

"Yes, it is I. You didn't recognise me at first did you?" Hammond looked very uncomfortable.

"I suppose it was because you are in a chair."

"No, I don't think so."

"I heard you were ill. I was very sorry, but —but I hardly thought you would care for my sympathy, and I was sure you wouldn't want to see me."

"Won't you sit down for a minute?" she said.

"Certainly, with pleasure."

He went to a little green seat, brought it up to the side of her chair, and sat down.

"I hope you are getting stronger," he said.

"No, I shall never be any stronger, only weaker. I'm dying, Mr Hammond."

"I am deeply grieved," he said.

And he looked as if he really meant it.

"I want to tell you something," she said. "You were quite right about Peter Orwyn. He was a humbug, poor man, and he took me in deliberately. He has confessed it to me. But I can't feel that he is a really bad man."

After a moment of silence Hammond said,

"I am afraid finding out must have made you very unhappy."

"No; not now. At first it did."

"I am glad you have got over it."

"I think I'm like you. I'm always glad to rest upon truth."

"Are you resting upon truth now?"

"At any rate I don't think I'm clinging to lies. You won't pursue Peter Orwyn any more, will you?"

"Oh no. I've quite done with him. Besides I understand he has given up all those practices."

"Yes. His son has been killed."

"Why should that——"

"He thinks that now his son might know if he were to be insincere, to go on tricking people."

"Oh, is that the reason?" said Hammond, with a strong touch of sarcasm.

"Yes," she said, earnestly. "It is that. Peter Orwyn was a humbug who believed."

"That spirits can come back to this earth?"

"No, but that they still exist somewhere, and may know of our activities here."

"That is possible," said Hammond. "I don't think science has ever proved the contrary. But then——"

He stopped, looking at her sharply thin face and now sunken eyes.

"I shall know very soon how it all is," she said.

"Yes, you will know. But you will never come back to tell us the great secret."

At this moment a child ran past them giving to the wind a pink bladder which she held at the end of a string. The bladder floated up bravely in the sun, and the child's face was alight with triumph. As she ran by she gave them a look out of her blue eyes that was like a challenge to them to share in her joy and to commend her for her capacity. When she had gone, running through the sunlight towards the

flickering shadows of the trees, Hammond said,

"That child's eyes tell me a great deal more than all the spiritualists are able to tell me."

"What do they tell you?" she asked.

"That hope lies at the foundation of human existence," he answered. "We all fly our pink balls. We all feel, when they tug at the string, as if they had wings. Perhaps that's because we ourselves have wings. The man who sets out to destroy false hopes may have very real ones himself."

"Have you?"

"Oh yes. But I don't know that I could even explain them."

"Don't try to," she said.

She held out her thin hand to him.

"Good-bye, Mr Hammond. Once I think I was angry with you. But now we can part friends."

He had got up. He took off his hat as he held her hand.

"Do you remember what I once said to you, quoting Euripides?" he asked.

"Who knows if life be not death and death be not life?"

"It may be so."

"It may—who knows?"

He bent down and looked into her eyes.

"Perhaps you will know—before," he said, as if almost startled by something.

Then he suddenly reddened, looked embarrassed, dropped her hand, and said,

"Good-bye. I'm glad to have seen you."

He put on his hat rather awkwardly, and walked away, looking slightly self-conscious.

CHAPTER XII

As the days went by Mrs Marden began to feel more definitely the rapid decline of her physical strength. She was obliged to give up going out in the bath-chair. But she still spent a part of each day on the sofa in the drawing-room not far from an open window. July was over and the dull warmth of August lay over the City. But London was still very full. People who usually fled at the end of the "season" were most of them doing war work, and there had been no "season" that year.

The only visitors Mrs Marden saw, however, were her sister, Miss King, her doctor and Doctor Layton.

Annie came often and was increasingly distressed at Mrs Marden's state of body and mind. She simply could not comprehend how any well brought up, right minded woman, could draw near to the gates of death without reaching out for the spiritual consolations so liberally provided by the Church of England. Again and again she spoke of dear Father Burch, who was "so understanding, so broadminded", so ready to meet all doubts in the way and slay them!

She brought with her books such as bring consolation to many, books full of sentiment, hope, gush, books of dreams, allegories, imaginary moments in Heaven; books, too, by American authors almost bursting their covers with "cheer" and full throated optimism, dealing with the doings of sunshiny pious beings, who revelled in their misfortunes, thanked God that they were cripples, and welcomed the most diabolical complaints with the loud Te Deums which are never heard but in fiction.

"They are such helpful books, dear!" she would say, as she laid them on her sister's table.

"Are they true books?" Mrs Marden would answer.

"I daresay they are. But we can hardly expect everything in a book to be founded on fact, can we, dear? That would be asking too much."

Mrs Marden never read these books. Indeed she read very little, and often lay for hours quietly with her eyes wide open, scarcely moving and seldom speaking.

Miss King came often to see her, and sometimes read aloud to her. Then she could lie still without talking, and listen, or not listen, as she pleased. But when the book was put away, and they did talk, by a mutual tacit consent they avoided any mention of those problems

of the soul which they had often discussed in the past. Miss King believed that her dying friend was still listening in a bare place quite alone. She often wished that she could break in on the loneliness, do something to make the bare place blossom with flowers and thrill with the songs of birds. The austere loneliness of her friend, so near to the loneliness of death, roused in her an ache of longing to be of some use, some comfort. But she knew that in Mrs Marden's peculiar condition of body and mind any human attempt at consolation, any endeavour to influence, would be useless, would even be secretly resented. The physical change in Mrs Marden seemed to have given greater strength to the obstinacy which had always been characteristic of her. Sometimes Miss King's imagination visualised her as a woman listening with her ear to the ground, and one hand lifted in warning lest any human voice should intrude on the silence around her.

Mrs Marden had become fond of Doctor Layton. He had a mind that interested her deeply, and she was able to be quite unreserved with him. The fact that he was a doctor, not a clergyman, made her strangely at ease with him. He would never try to lay a finger on her soul. He, too, was unreserved with her.

Science, which he worshipped, had given him much. But it had robbed him of the firm beliefs of his youth.

"Science has a sharp sword," he once said to Mrs Marden. "And it isn't afraid to slay."

He was a close student of humanity and sometimes spoke to her of the contradictions which seem to exist between what science implies, and what human beings imply, or seem to imply.

"Science," he said, "often conveys to me a 'No' while human beings convey to me a 'Yes'. It is as if science said, 'That cannot be', while human beings are saying, 'It is.'"

And he told her some curious instances of the abrupt changes in belief which had been brought about in his experience by the approach of death, or by death.

One was a change in a noted scientific man, who had had one child, a daughter whom he had loved with intensity. For years he had lived not only without any belief in a future life, but openly denying that there could be any life after death. He had indeed been almost fanatical in his materialism, and had published writings which had destroyed the beliefs of many people. His daughter, while still quite young, had been run over by a motor car, and had died a few days after the accident. The

Father had seen her die. Ever since then he had been a convinced believer in an after life.

"Why?" Mrs Marden asked.

"What was his reason? It wouldn't have been accepted by science, but it was enough for the scientist. It was simply the look in his child's eyes when she was dying."

"Could you be convinced by such a thing?"

"I might, perhaps, if I cared as he did. Human affection is one of the greatest of the mysteries."

"Yes. It is odd that sometimes our eyes seem to convey to people things—messages—which our minds know nothing of."

"Yes?" said Doctor Layton, and waited.

She was thinking of Cecil Hammond's strange look at her, and strange remark to her, just before he had bidden her good-bye in the Park. But she said nothing more on that subject, and Doctor Layton left it. He never persisted in any conversation against Mrs Marden's inclination. And that was partly the reason of the ease which she always felt in his company.

One day, when she was lying on the sofa in the drawing-room quite alone, a thrill of pain went through her. It was acute, like a thing full of intense life, and seemed to her long, as if it were stretched out, as elastic may be

stretched by strong hands till it almost splits. She sat up quickly. Her cheeks flushed. The blood went to her head. She was filled with intense apprehension. But as abruptly as it had come the pain disappeared.

She felt as if she had been visited by something terrible, endowed with an unnaturally vivid life, which had left her with a menacing backward look at her and a promise to return again.

So—she was to suffer after all! She was not to be spared the ugly agony of the body.

She put her hand on the bell, meaning to summon the nurse. The horrible heat often caused by pain persisted in her. She longed to escape from her body, to burst out of it and to run away, leaving it lying there with its dreadful inhabitant, the disease which was ravaging it. She meant to send for the doctor, to ask for an opiate, for morphia, anything that would keep away pain, or dull it, smother it. But though her finger remained on the bell, touching it, she did not press it down. Something stopped her from doing that. At first she did not know what it was, and she waited, still thinking that she was going to sound the bell. Then she took away her hand and lay back on the sofa. Something said to her,

"You are Ronald's Mother. You are not going to be a coward."

The thrill of pain had seemed to carry a message. She felt as if for an instant she had heard a voice in the bare place. It had died away. But she thought it would come again.

She knew of course that the pain had been caused by something which the disease was doing in her body, that its seat must be really in the brain. Yet she could not rid herself of the strange idea that it had conveyed a message. Somehow she had seemed to feel God in it. The thrill of it had been like an assertion: "You belong to me and you cannot escape me."

She lay there pondering, looking back over her past life. She had not found God in her happiness, not even in her happiness with Ronald. She had not found Him in Church, in Hornton Street, in her war work at the hospital. She had not found Him in her grief at the loss of her boy. Surely pain, a mere physical horror, a thing wholly of the body, could not bring her into any relation with God. Such an idea seemed to her ridiculous. Nevertheless she knew that the thrust of pain through her body had been also like a thrust of mysterious knowledge through her soul.

The agony did not return that day, and she

did not mention it to the nurse. But in the night it came back and woke her from sleep. And this time it stayed with her longer. She suffered so much that she found herself praying for strength and courage to bear it if it might not be taken from her. Her prayer was instinctive: at that moment she could not help praying. And presently the pain faded away.

Then she lay and wondered about her prayer. It had been absolutely spontaneous like a sudden cry. And it had seemed as if the whole of her was in it, all of herself which she knew about, but also much else about which she had never known anything till now, hidden things, mysteries, things that had slept till that moment, and had wakened when she woke to the pain.

The nurse, who slept in an adjoining room, came softly in perhaps subconsciously drawn to the sick woman.

"Can't you sleep?" she asked.

"I have been asleep."

"You're not in pain, are you?"

"No; not now."

"Have you been in pain?"

"Yes. It woke me up."

The nurse, who was a middle-aged woman,

very kind and capable, looked full of sympathy.

"I felt it for the first time this afternoon," said Mrs Marden.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"It only lasted a moment then. Were you expecting it?"

"Well, sometimes in cases like this there is pain——"

She paused.

"Towards the end, you mean?" said Mrs Marden.

"We never quite know when it will come. I'll speak to the doctor about it to-morrow. There are ways of easing it."

"Yes, I know—morphia."

"I can give you something now that will help you to sleep again."

"No, I'd rather not have anything. I'm quite comfortable. You go back, Nurse, and sleep."

"But I can stay with you."

"No, Nurse. I'm all right alone."

"I'll leave the door ajar into the dressing-room. Then I can come in a moment if you want me."

"Thank you."

The nurse went softly away. She left the

door ajar, and from her bed Mrs Marden could see a faint shining of light. Her own room was in darkness.

Since she had had the pain she had felt she was dying. Though she had known that before she had evidently not really felt it. She was now like one who has been told of something and has believed it, but has suddenly had her knowledge made vivid by actual sight of the thing.

That made all the difference.

She now felt death within her definitely, tremendously. She looked at the faint light in the space between the door and the doorway. In it, half shutting her eyes, and consciously bringing her imagination into play, she saw many of the activities of the past; she saw herself as a wife, a young mother, a widow with a boy growing to manhood, a gay, pleasure-loving woman, at theatres, restaurants, dinners, at homes, at Newmarket and Ascot, travelling abroad, at Aix, Monte Carlo, in Egypt, Sicily, Rome; then parting from Ronald with a smile when he went to France; later selling souvenirs and programmes in crowded theatres, with Lady Mariana always near her. She saw Hanson handing her a telegram, Lady Terrerton at St-Martin's-in-

the-Fields, the Canadian soldier's slate-coloured eyes. Then she saw a round table in a narrow room and Peter Orwyn and herself sitting at it; she saw a concertina, a rattle, a tambourine; last of all she saw the melancholy clergyman looking down from a pulpit with earnest, miserable eyes.

And all that had passed with almost incredible swiftness, the tale of her life! That could not be all surely? She could not have been created, a woman full of mysteries, of capacities which even now she had hardly begun to realise, only for that? Love could not have been put into her only for that? It would surely be too great an irony if, after living such a life, she were to cease just when she was beginning to understand something of all that she held within her, just when she was beginning to recognise her own possibilities, just when she was beginning to pray.

Could the prayer she had uttered have been forced from her by mere terror? Had it been only an instinctive call for help? She wondered. If a doctor had been in the room she would probably have called out to him. As there had been no doctor she had called out to God.

But the nurse had been within call.

Moved by an imperious need she began to pray again.

She had not forgotten how, long ago, her brain had utterly rejected the belief that any Being could exist who was able to create multitudes of worlds, and who was nevertheless also able to pay attention to a woman in bed in Hans Place. Her brain could not grasp such a conception of Deity. But now something else in her, perhaps made humble by the assaults of pain, prayed, and presently she felt as if Ronald knew of what she was doing and approved it. The sensation she had had in church of the uselessness of prayer died away from her. She felt as if she were being listened to.

In the morning, although she had had but little sleep, she was calm and at ease, though very weak and tired.

"I shan't get up to-day," she said to the nurse. "I don't think I shall ever get up again."

The nurse looked at her gently and said,

"You must do just as you feel inclined. I have telephoned to the doctor to come as soon as possible."

When the doctor came, and was told, he spoke of means of subduing the agony. Mrs

Marden questioned him about its cause. He tried to evade any definite reply. But she insisted, and finally he satisfied her curiosity.

"Do you expect the end to come soon?" she asked. "I wish you to tell me. I'm not afraid."

"I don't think your suffering will last very long."

After a pause he added,

"Wouldn't you like to see a clergyman?"

"You think it's time for me to have a visit from a soul doctor?" she said, with a faint smile.

The doctor—he happened to be a good churchman—looked rather shocked.

"You might like to prepare——" he began.

"My sister, Annie, has been talking to you, hasn't she?" Mrs Marden interrupted.

"She just mentioned that she had a great friend——"

"Was it Father Burch?"

"I believe that was the name."

"I don't want him. I don't think he knows anything more about God than I do."

"I'll send you some morphia. The nurse knows how and when to administer it."

When he was about to leave her Mrs Marden said to him,

"Are *you* afraid to die, Doctor?"

The doctor—he was an elderly, large man, with a dignified imposing manner, and an accommodating smile—looked embarrassed.

"I really——" he began, and paused.

"Death is a natural process," he said, pulling himself together. "We doctors are so familiar with it that——"

"But your *own* death?" she said.

"I think about other people. It is my business to think about them."

"Yes, of course. Good-bye, Doctor."

"Your sister is in a very peculiar state of mind," he said to Annie, who was waiting in the drawing-room. "I advise you not to worry her."

"What did she say?"

"Well, she said she thought she knew as much about God as Father Burch did."

"But Father Burch is a clergyman!"

"Yes, I know. Still that is what she thinks."

"Poor—poor Evelyn!" said Annie, wringing her hands.

As the disease in Mrs Marden progressed the attacks of pain became frequent. One night, when she was suffering severely, she was

given morphia. She had never taken morphia before and its effect upon her was strange. Just at first it seemed to be powerless, and she feared that in spite of it the agony would continue. But presently she felt an extraordinary change in her condition. She seemed to be two people. Two women seemed to be lying side by side in the bed. Each of these women was herself. In one of these women the pain still persisted. She seemed to be all body, flesh and blood with disease in it. The other woman had a body but had also something else quite independent of the body, quite untouched by any disease. And she lay there entirely at ease, peaceful, contented, even happy, and knew of the pain in the other woman but did not mind it at all. She didn't mind it because her soul was immune. She was released from the sensation of pain although she was aware of pain still going on in the body which lay beside hers. The absolute consciousness of duality possessed her.

When the effect of the morphia wore away the two women were merged together and became one.

The relief she had experienced had been very wonderful. Nevertheless she refused to have

morphia again. For she felt that it interfered, like a shut door, heavily padded, between her and a voice which was speaking to her, and which she wished to hear clearly. She was now convinced of the absolute independence of the soul. Perhaps she could not have described this feeling. Certainly she could not have argued about it. Had an atheist said to her, "But what about morphia? When morphia was injected into you didn't it get at what you call your soul? Was not your whole outlook entirely changed by it for the time?" She would not have known what to answer. If she had told the plain truth she could only have said, "I feel God in the pain as I have never felt Him in anything else. But I also feel that my soul is independent, is beyond the pain, out of its reach. There is in me something remote which is able to look on at the pain, as someone who is healthy may look on at the agony of one who is dying. And this something is aware of God as the sender of pain."

The sense of rebellion which she had been conscious of in her mental agony at the loss of her boy, the desire to believe in a personal God so that she might be able to hate

Him, had died out of her utterly. She felt that she was now in almighty hands and she was now contented to be in them. She did not say to herself, "I believe it is so". She said to herself, "I feel it is so." As she had once said to Miss King about knowing in the dark when someone was near, whom it was impossible to see, or to hear, that she seemed to feel it with her skin, so she seemed to feel this with her skin. But she told herself imaginatively that it was the skin of her soul which felt it, not the skin of her body.

It was an extraordinary sensation, unreasonable no doubt, inexplicable, but terrifically vital.

And the pain seemed to be God claiming her, thrusting His way towards her soul through the body in which it was housed.

After each fresh attack of pain she felt more intensely conscious of God, more intensely aware of the freedom of the soul in the body.

"The disease, wherever it penetrates, will never be able to reach it," she said to herself. "Therefore it cannot be killed when the body is killed."

As her bodily powers rapidly declined she

was also conscious that she was making a journey. Ronald no longer seemed to be near her in the house. But she felt that she was travelling towards the region whither he had preceded her.

. . . . . .

One day Mrs Marden said to the nurse,

"Please go to the telephone and beg Miss King to come here at once. I must see her. You know the number, don't you?"

"Oh yes."

"Ask her not to delay."

"I will."

The nurse went towards the door, then paused,

"Shall I send for your sister too?" she asked.

"No. She was here this morning."

"Yes, I know. But she might like to come again."

"She's my sister but—no, I would rather only see Miss King."

"Very well."

"Do you think me selfish, Nurse?"

"No; you must see the one you wish to see."

"If I am selfish I can't help it."

The nurse went out.

Towards evening Miss King arrived and came up to Mrs Marden's bedside.

"Sit down by me, Emily," said her friend in a weak voice.

Miss King kissed her and sat down close to the bed.

After a silence Mrs Marden said,

"I wish to tell you something."

"Yes dear?"

"I have left you some money in my will."

Miss King said nothing. She put up one hand and settled her tie. Then she looked towards the window. Her lips were compressed, and her boyish face looked almost stern.

"But that is not what I sent for you to tell you."

"Please—please——" said Miss King, in an odd, husky voice.

"What I wanted to tell you is this. Once you said to me—I can't remember exactly—that perhaps some day I should get help—or enlightenment was it—something like that—from the last quarter I should expect to get it from. Well, I have got it."

"Yes?"

"I have got it from my disease."

"But how could you?"

"I scarcely know. But the pain I have suffered has given it to me. I felt God really for the first time in that. Isn't it strange?"

"Yes."

"The pain has made me feel that I belong to God. I thought you would like to know."

"I—I am very thankful," said Miss King.

"Yes, it's a great mercy for me. You don't need to suffer. But I did. Some of us do, and I am one of them. I understand now why people have different fates. Happiness and health told me nothing. And my sorrow about Ronald didn't tell me. But now I know. Of course I don't really understand anything—with my mind, I mean. I still wonder, in a way, how it all can be as it is. I have no real conception of God even now. But I just feel Him. And that is quite enough."

"Yes, yes, dear."

After a long silence Mrs Marden said,

"Once Mr Hammond said something to me which I have never forgotten."

"What was that?"

"He quoted a saying. It was Euripides, I think—'Who knows if life be not death and death be not life'?"

"Yes?"

"I know, Emily. Isn't that strange?"

. . . . . .

Miss King did not leave the house that night.

When the clocks in the City had just struck eleven Mrs Marden lived—at last.

TO CLUB MEMBERS:

In order to avoid the annoyances of former years, will you see that the book you have is passed on the Saturday it is due, even if not finished for every member wants their book for Sunday?

Do not loan a club book.